Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/gladysreaper00beal_2

GLADYS, THE REAPER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"SIMPLICITY AND FASCINATION."

". . . . standing like Ruth amid the alien corn."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
1860.

LONDON:
Printed by A. Schulze, 13, Poland Street.

GLADYS, THE REAPER.

CHAPTER I.

THE LADY IN HER OWN RIGHT.

When Freda reached her room, Gladys was awaiting her there.

"Why, did you not go to bed, Gladys, you know I dislike your sitting up so late."

"I could not go to bed, Ma'am, feeling that I have offended you, without begging your pardon for having done so."

"Then all you said was an invention, an imagination?"

"I said nothing but the truth, Ma'am, but perhaps I was wrong in saying it to you, merely to excuse myself. If so, I am very sorry."

There were traces of tears on Gladys' face, and she looked pale and agitated.

"Gladys, you can go to bed, I have nothing to forgive. If you tell me the truth, I am very sorry for it, and that such words should have been said to you. Of course you did not believe them?"

"No, Ma'am, I certainly did not."

Miss Gwynne was fidgetting with her dress, and Gladys went to assist her, uncalled for. When it was unfastened, Miss Gwynne again said, "Thank you, that will do; I wish you to go to bed; good night," and Gladys again obeyed in sorrow.

Miss Gwynne had litttle sleep that night, and the next morning she felt very ill. Much as she longed to lie in bed, however, and to avoid meeting Colonel Vaughan again, she got up when Gladys called her, and was, as usual, first down stairs. Much to her satisfaction, her father appeared next, and the Colonel soon afterwards. She exerted herself to talk and laugh as usual, and the only difference in her manner to Colonel Vaughan was, that instead of shaking hands with him, as was her custom

every morning, she busied herself with the cups and saucers, when he approached, and simply said, good morning. Her father remarked that she was looking ill, and she said she had one of her old head-aches.

When breakfast was over, she expressed her intention of going to the school, and said that, as Colonel Vaughan was going to Sir Hugh's, she probably should not see him again before he left. She wished him good morning, and a pleasant visit, stiffly, but courteously, felt compelled to shake hands with him, and went her way with a proud, but aching heart. He also went his, wondering in his very selfish heart, whether Freda really cared for him after all, and scheming to see Gladys, whose utter careless of him had roused his vanity.

When he had left Glanaravon, with a promise to Mr. Gwynne of returning, Freda no longer strove to appear what she was not, and went to bed, really ill. She was subject to occasional severe nervous head-aches, and was obliged to be very quiet when so attacked, in order to prevent congestion of the brain, which the doctors had once threatened her with. Her

father, therefore, insisted on her keeping her room until she was quite well, which she was only too thankful to do, and so great were her actual sufferings from her head, that they distracted her mind from brooding over its real or imaginary miseries.

Gladys waited on her quietly and patiently for about a week, at the end of which time, she began to feel better. Her gratitude to Gladys for the perfectly unobtrusive nature of her attention was so great, that she felt as if she could never do enough for her, and she frequently assured her that she knew she had been unjust towards her in accusing her of falsehood. She never, however, again mentioned Colonel Vaughan's name to her.

Mr. Gwynne paid daily visits to his daughter's sick room. In spite of her head, she could not help noticing something peculiar in his manner. He did not talk, because conversation was forbidden during these attacks, but there was an increased briskness in his eyes and step, as he approached her, and she fancied, more of anxious care in his tone when he spoke.

She was sure he had something to communicate.

"Gladys, what makes you so calm and patient?" she suddenly asked, when she was getting better, and trying to reason herself out of her fancy for Colonel Vaughan.

"Perhaps, Ma'am, trouble has made me calm, and I pray to be made patient; but I have a very rebellious heart," was the reply.

"Have you? I am very glad to hear it. Then there is hope for me. Now I am going to get up."

Freda had made some good resolutions during the intervals of her pain, the principal of which were, entirely to forget Colonel Vaughan, or to feel only intense contempt for him; to be more gentle with her father, and more considerate of his nerves and peculiarities; more patient with the servants, school-children, and poor people generally; to do more good, and to be more useful to others: but she had not made these resolutions in Gladys' spirit. They were not made with prayer for help, but in her own strength.

In the same way, she threw off the remains

of her head-ache, and went down stairs again with a prouder step, and a prouder heart than when she went up last.

In the library she found her father, writing a letter, and looking quite animated. He was so sprucely dressed, that she asked him if he were going out.

"Not at present," he said. "I am so glad you are come down again. There is so much to tell you; I have scarcely been able to keep myself from letting you hear the news. Do you know it is all settled, and Gwynne Vaughan is actually engaged to Miss Nugent! Isn't he a lucky fellow?"

Freda felt suddenly very sick; she sat down in an arm-chair near her father, but did not speak. He looked at her, and said,

"My dear, you are very pale still. Coming down stairs has been too much, and dressing, and—and—all that sort of thing. Let me ring for Gladys."

"No, I shall be better directly. Only the exertion—yes, you were telling me—"

Strange that Mr. Gwynne never supposed that Freda could be in love with any one. She

had refused so many, and was so different from other girls, that the thought never entered his mind, and he had left her alone with Colonel Vaughan, and would have done so with Cupid himself, quite thoughtless of results. Moreover, his own natural inactivity and love of ease, led him to allow her to take her own course, as long as she left him alone to take his.

"Yes; I was saying that it is now quite settled. I believe he proposed the very ball-night to Miss Nugent, at least, and the next day went in form, and after certain preliminaries, was duly accepted by all parties. Of course, he is quite unexceptionable, and she can do as she likes now she is of age. Lady Mary expected a title, and I don't think she is quite satisfied. She told me—at least—they say—at least—of course, there are always objections, and—and—all that sort of thing, you know."

Freda was too hard at work, trying to overcome a very strong desire to burst into tears, to observe that her father had not once used his favourite phrase, or lost the thread of his words, until he came to "Lady Mary told

me," so when he stopped, she simply said, "Really! Yes!" and he went on again.

"I must confess, Freda, I am rather disappointed. I thought Gwynne liked you, and, indeed, I think so still. But—ah! my dear—you are so proud, or cold, or—or—that you refuse every one. It has been suggested to me by—ah! I have remarked, I mean, that you must have a secret liking for some one, not quite what one considers—ah!—eligible, and that—but, I am sure, Freda, I would make any sacrifice for your happiness, and should wish to see you married."

"What do you mean, papa?" said Freda, effectually roused.

"Well, my dear, it is thought—I mean I have fancied—I mean Lady—I—I—the fact is, are you attached to Rowland Prothero? Now, I am not angry, Freda; he is one of the nicest young men, and the best—but I should have preferred Gwynne, or Sir Hugh, or—or—in fact, many others, in a worldly point of view. A tenant's son, and only a curate!—and all that sort of thing. But then, as Lady—as—as I—as your father, my dear, I should like to

make you happy. You see, that day at the Vicarage, we—that is to say, I—thought there was something peculiar in his manner and yours; and to be sure, he may be a bishop, he is so good and clever. A great favourite of mine. And if he lives in London, it doesn't so much matter; and—and—in short—Freda—"

"Papa, I understand," said Freda, rising from her seat with most majestic pride, "Lady Mary has been kind enough to suggest, doubtless for her own ends, what never could have entered your mind. I am very much obliged to you for forgetting, on my account, what I cannot forget on my own, that I am a Gwynne of Glanaravon! and I daresay you meant it kindly. But you may make my compliments to Lady Mary Nugent, and tell her, that if there was anything peculiar in Rowland Prothero's manner on that particular Sunday, it was because he had been bold enough to propose for me, and I had rejected him. You may tell her, also, that if he had asked her daughter instead, she would have given him herself and her fortune quite as willingly, and, I believe, more

willingly, than to Colonel Vaughan. With her, it is a case of 'First come, first served."

When Freda had given her message to Lady Mary Nugent, she walked out of the room. But scarcely had she crossed the hall, when she turned again, and re-entered it.

"Papa, I must beg you *not* to tell Lady Mary Nugent that Rowland Prothero proposed for me. He is, at least, a gentleman, and a man of honour, and deserves to be treated as such, with all due courtesy. The more I see of men, the more I begin to think him one of the few true gentlemen one meets with. I should not even have told you this, had it not escaped me, in reply to what you said; because I thought it would annoy you, and, perhaps, make you feel unkindly towards the Prothero family. But you may tell her, if you like, that were Rowland Prothero not the gentleman I begin to perceive he is, Miss Nugent and her money might be his."

"But Freda—after all—if you do like him. You see, his uncle married a Perry, one of the

oldest families in Herefordshire; niece of the Baronet, daughter of the Dean, cousin of the present Baronet."

"My dear father! I know all the Perrys by heart. Mrs. Jonathan is not likely to have left me ignorant of their antiquity. But pray do you want to get rid of me, that you force me upon poor Rowland, or him upon me, whichever it may be?"

"Of course not, my dear. Only I am naturally anxious to see you settled. And if you really like him—"

"But I am settled, and I do not like him; that is to say, I like him well enough, fifty times better than I used to like him; but I have not the most remote intention of marrying him. And now, I should like to know what particular reason Lady Mary Nugent had for putting this absurd notion into your head. There must be something, my dear papa, under all this sudden anxiety to get me married. You used rather to rejoice when I declined settling Glanaravon on a suitor."

"Yes, my dear—but—you see—it is not quite certain that Glanaravon—I mean that

you—I mean that I—in short—the fact is—you are so impetuous, Freda.

"What can my impetuosity have to do with it?"

Freda saw that her father was more than usually nervous and fidgetty, and became alarmed lest there should be some sudden money difficulty, as any threat, however slight, of debt or involvement, always made him ill. She sat down beside him, and putting her hand in his, as it rested on a table nervously fidgetting with a pen, she said gently,

"Now, pappy, I hope we are not all going to jail?"

"By no means; the tenants are most prosperous. I could raise any sum if necessary, and give you a marriage portion suitable in every way."

What was there in this marriage scheme? Freda grew impatient and indignant again.

"Now, really, papa, this is too absurd? If you have anything on your mind, will you say it?"

"Well—the fact is, Freda, that you—I mean that I, have made up my mind—you see you

may marry, and leave me alone, and I should want a companion, and—and all that sort of thing you know—so I have considered—for your—for our—for my, perhaps—happiness, that it might be well for me to—to—to—in short, my dear—to marry again, in fact, Freda, I have resolved to do so."

"Lady Mary Nugent!" screamed Freda, "not her! not her! not settled! oh papa!"

Mr. Gwynne had called Freda impetuous, but he was not prepared for the sudden burst of uncontrollable grief that followed his announcement. Often as Freda had jested over the proposal Lady Mary was to make her father, she had never believed that he would marry her. It came upon her like the news of an unexpected death, or great family misfortune. She covered her face with her hands, and sobbed till her father thought she must burst some blood vessel then and there before him. He got up, sat down; went to the bell, touched the rope, let it go; opened the window, put his hand on Freda's bowed head, called her by name, and, in return, was greeted by,

"Not Lady Mary! think of my mother!

think of me! oh father! father! cruel! this is too much! Say it is not true; only a jest. What have I done? I will be better, kinder, gentler—I will nurse you, tend you—never, marry. I would rather not—I never shall. Nobody loves you as well as I. Your only child. My mother's only child. Say it is not true—oh, say it is not true."

This was impossible, for Mr. Gwynne knew full well that he was pledged beyond recall. But now, as he looked on his daughter, heard her words, thought of her mother, he began to repent of what he had done. He, who hated scenes, dreaded tears, would not annoy Freda for the world, to have raised such emotion! He did not understand it. Lady Mary had assured him Freda would be so glad to be allowed to marry Rowland. And she was so discerning and clever! But he could not bear those sobs.

"Freda! my dear, don't I beg, I entreat! You will make me so nervous. You know I cannot bear—in short, I feel quite ill. The fact is, you will make yourself ill, and, after all, it need make no difference to you. You

will be just the same. Freda, I must beg you to desist. I must insist—I will ring for the housekeeper."

"No, no, papa. Do not let us expose ourselves!" cried Freda, rising suddenly; "I will go up-stairs. Neither you nor I shall ever be happy again!"

Freda was about to leave the room when Mr. Gwynne suddenly went up to her, and putting his arm round her neck, whispered whilst the tears sprang into his eyes,

"Freda, Freda! my child, forgive me! I didn't think it would vex you so. I scarcely know how it has all happened."

Poor Freda threw both her arms around her father, and sobbed again. As she leaned on his shoulder, his white hairs touched the brown glossy braids of her head, and his lips kissed them. At that moment ke knew that he did not love Lady Mary Nugent as well as he loved his child, and that child was conscious for the first time how very dear her father was to her.

Again she roused herself, and as if ashamed of her emotion, hastened out of the room. She went up stairs, and locking herself in her room

threw herself on her bed. Here she gave way to feelings that were as new as strange to her, unaccustomed as she was to what some one calls "the luxury of tears." She scarcely knew whether sorrow or anger predominated, but she was wretched and indignant. Tumultuous thoughts rushed through her mind of the past, present, and probable future; thoughts too numerous and changeable to be transcribed, but which may well be imagined.

At last her pride, that one grand feature of her character, got the better of her grief and anger. She rose from her bed, dried her eyes, arranged her hair, and with a carriage as erect as her soul was haughty, once more entered her father's library. The momentary emotion and pathos of their last embrace had been overpowered in both by stronger sensations; in him by the remembrance of Lady Mary Nugent's fascinations, in her by the sense of that lady's tact and duplicity.

Freda sat quietly down opposite her father, and said abruptly,

"Papa, this odious subject must be begun and ended between us this day. If you will be

good enough to answer me a few questions and to listen to me, I will never mention it again. Are you really engaged to Lady Mary Nugent, or is it a horrible dream?"

"I—yes—I certainly am, my dear—engaged to be married to her ladyship."

"And you mean to marry her? Impossible!"

"Do you consider me a man of honour? or am I one likely to break my word when pledged?"

"Oh! papa, when a woman proposes and makes love, and waits till the very moment when it suits her own convenience to marry, do you think she deserves consideration? You know that Lady Mary Nugent has done it all herself, and that you would never have taken the trouble, or had the courage to propose for any woman under the sun, if she had not asked you first. You know you do not want to marry. I would give the world to know how she managed to bring you to the point."

"Really, Freda, this is too—too—personal, and rude, I may call it,—and—"

"Forgive me, papa. Of course you are

your own master, and are at liberty to be chosen by any woman, but she will not choose me, nor I her. I hate Lady Mary Nugent, despise her most intensely, and shall leave this house before she comes into it; never—"

It seemed as if an invisible hand checked the end of Freda's determination, for she stopped short at the "never."

"But what I came particularly to say, papa, is, that I believe I have some little private fortune of my own, my dear mother's in short, and I suppose I can have that when I like."

"Certainly—certainly—but—"

"Then I wish both you and Lady Mary Nugent to understand that I shall not live here. Not on your account, but on hers. I ask as a particular favour that I may not be informed of the day of your marriage; and I shall make it a point of going away in a month or so, so as to leave you free to act. I shall hope to hear from you, and to write to you. I am only sorry for you, because she cannot understand your tastes; but that is nothing. I don't think either she or her daughter ever read any book but a fash-

ionable novel in their lives. But what is the difference! Money and tact against the world! I cannot help speaking my mind for this first and last time. Forgive me. You will not have me long to speak it, and my successor never spoke her's in her life, so she will not bore you by abruptness and sincerity, as I perhaps have done."

Freda had spoken so fast that she paused to take breath, and during that necessary process her father wiped his face, as if he, too, were exhausted by her volubility. Freda could scarcely help smiling.

"I am very sorry for everything I have ever done to displease you," she began again; "and I only hope you will not be so unhappy as I am afraid you will be."

"This is too exhausting!" muttered Mr. Gwynne, sinking back in his chair. "Freda, you really do talk too much. Will you ring for Perkins? I must take a dose of that cordial."

When the cordial was mentioned, Freda knew that all conversation was at end. She rang the bell, and when Perkins came, left the room.

She went at once to her writing desk, and wrote the following note :—

"My dearest Serena,

"What you and I have sometimes feared, is about to come to pass. My father is going to marry Lady Mary Nugent. Of course I can no longer live here ; will you and Mr. Jones give me shelter for a time whilst I arrange my thoughts and plans ? I will give as little trouble as I can, but I know you will bear with me.

"Your loving friend,

"WINIFRED GWYNNE."

Freda sealed and directed her letter, and then went to the open window, and stood there for some time. A slight shower of rain was falling, and a few light clouds were struggling with the afternoon sunbeams. Strong shadows fell from the trees in the Park, equally strong lights were on the distant hills. The river looked hot and hazy, and the cattle had congregated under the arch of the bridge—the only cool spot—as if for shelter from the sun. A shrill, blithe, distant whistle sounded, and the bells of Llan-

fawr church pealed in the far-away town, just sending their faint echoes across the river.

"What are those bells ringing for?" said Freda, as she wiped away some large tears that were gathering in her eyes. "They ring for everything; soon, it will be for these odious marriages. Why was I ever born? Why, above all, was I born in such a place as this? And to leave it! Yes, Frisk (to her terrier, that was barking and jumping outside the window), you and I must go away. No more quarrels with Jerry; no more fights with Gelert; no more hunts in the brook. Will you come with me to smoky London? Yes, and hate it as much as I shall. Sleep away your life by a city fire, and grow fat and old, instead of racing after me and Prince. But we shall not live long in a town, Frisk. We shall soon die of sheer laziness, and so much the better—for who will care for us? Lion and Jerry and even Gipsey will forget you; and every one has forgotten me already. Why am I so foolish as to cry so? I never knew how weak I could be until these last few days. But we must be strong, Frisk—we must be strong, and not care for this old

place, and the beautiful park, and all the—Oh, why will those bells ring? and what are they ringing for? And there is the dinner bell, too! harsh as my lot. And I must try to be dutiful, and show a bold face and good courage to the world, who will pity me, or rejoice over me, and say that I wanted something to pull down my pride. And so, perhaps, I do; but this shall not be the something. No, no; it shall only make me prouder. Poor papa, too; he will be more wretched than I—I am sure he will. I cannot bear to think of him. Frisk! Frisk! don't make such a noise. Don't jump so, Frisk. There! I will take you in. Good dog! good Frisk! You love me if no one else does; you and Gladys."

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST-BORN.

THOSE Llanfawr bells which, as Freda said, certainly did ring for everything, were sending forth their chimes to celebrate the birth of a daughter at Plas Abertewey. But whilst they were ringing, and Freda was abusing them, the mother of the little daughter was, apparently, about to depart for that other country where bells shall no longer "ring out the old, and ring in the new," welcome the babe, or speed the spirit of the dead.

Good Dr. Richards and the nurse stood, one on either side of Netta's bed, pouring brandy and wine down her throat, whilst her infant was on its grandmother's, Mrs. Jenkins' lap, in the

next room. The doctor was in a state of intense anxiety. He had sent off one man and horse for another surgeon, and a second to Swansea, to telegraph for Howel, who had not yet returned from London, where he had been nearly three months. He felt the great responsibility of his situation, and that if Netta did not rally, she must die.

It was six o'clock in the evening; the baby had been born in the morning, and Netta's continual cry had been "Howel! Howel! When will my husband come?" But she had not spoken for some hours, and seemed to be sinking out of the world.

As Dr. Richards leaned over her, he thought she murmured something. Putting his ear close to her, he heard the words—"Mother! mother! oh, mother!"

"She shall come! you shall see her!" said Dr. Richards.

He went to a writing-table, and wrote as follows:—

"Mrs. Howel Jenkins is dying. The only chance to save her is her mother's presence. Come, for God's sake."

He went out of the room, and ordered the carriage and horses to be prepared at once, and sent them and the coachman to Glanaravon Farm. The man said it was as much as his place was worth to go; but Dr. Richards insisted, and he went.

In about two hours the carriage returned. Dr. Richards heard the distant sound of wheels, so did Netta. She opened her eyes, and with a painful, eager glance, again said, "Mother!"

Dr. Richards left the room, and, to his great joy, welcomed Mrs. Prothero in the hall.

"Thank God, you are come! She is yet alive," said he.

"I did not stop to ask David," said Mrs. Prothero, "but came straight away."

She followed Dr. Richards to Netta's room, and the feelings of the mother and the daughter may well be imagined, as they thus met after such a separation. Mrs. Prothero turned away and wept—then prepared to wait upon her child.

As the long absence of Howel, and his non-arrival day after day, according to promises almost daily made, had caused Netta's extreme prostration of mental as well as physical power;

so the presence of her mother appeared to revive and cheer her. Again she had some one near her who loved her. Her mother, whom she had so grievously offended had come to her in her trouble, and she was roused and comforted. The mother-in-law, who had been so anxious to take her from her parents, did not fill their places.

Whilst Mrs. Prothero was tenderly nursing her daughter, and gently assuring her of her love and forgiveness, Mrs. Griffey Jenkins was discussing her arrival with the various domestics and the nurse, who went into an adjoining room to have her supper, where Mrs. Griffey also had hers.

Their conversation was carried on in an under voice, and between sips of gin-and-water, Mrs. Griffey said,

"You do see, Mrs. Gwillim, that if Mrs. Howel was to die, my Howels 'ould be seure to be marrying again. He could have anybody."

"Of course, Ma'am—of course."

"There don't be a lady any where as 'ouldn't be proud to be marrying my Howels. Up in London there's my Lady Sinclairs, and a hundred

others; and down here there's Miss Nugent, or Miss Gwynne. You do see, Mrs. Gwillim, that though Mrs. Howels do be very respectable, she 'ouldn't be Mrs. Howel Jenkins, Abertewey, only my Howels was too honourable not to be marrying her. I 'ould be sorry after her, but if she was to be taken, why, she couldn't go at a better time. What was you thinking of her by now?"

"Very bad, Ma'am, very bad," said Mrs. Gwillim, ominously shaking her head.

And "very bad," Netta undoubtedly was all that night. Dr. Richards did not leave the house, and in due course of time the other medical man arrived; still, the half-expressed and wholly felt wishes of her mother-in-law for her death were not realized. The dawn of morning found her sleeping peaceably with her infant in her arms, and her mother thanking God that she was better.

At ten o'clock in the morning, carriage-wheels were again heard, and Mrs. Prothero trembled as Howel entered the house, and there was a consultation of doctors as to the propriety of his seeing his wife at once.

Mrs. Griffey anticipated every one else by going direct to Howel.

"How is she, mother?" were his first words.

"Better, they do say."

"Then why on earth did they telegraph for me. It may be the loss of thousands."

"Mrs. Prothero is with Netta, Howel bach."

"Who dared to bring her into my house?"

"Netta, I 'spose. They was turning *me* out of Glanaravon."

"And I'll turn her out of Abertewey, the canting old humbug."

Here Dr. Richards came in.

"She is out of danger, I hope, Mr. Jenkins, anxiety about you reduced her so low; and I took upon myself to send for her mother, who has roused her, and, I believe, saved her life. She knows you are come, and perhaps the sight of you for a moment may not injure her, as she is very anxious to see you; but we must not excite her."

Howel looked paler and darker than usual, and Dr. Richards attributed it, and his silence, to his emotion. They went together up-stairs, and Howel stood by the bed where lay his young

wife and his first-born child. As he looked upon the pale face of Netta, and saw her large black eyes gleam with joy, and her lips purse themselves up like a double cherry, to kiss him, he was touched. He bent over her, and kissed her warmly. When she uncovered a small portion of the bed-clothes, and displayed the infant that lay in her arms, a smile passed over his countenance, and he kissed his wife and child together.

"Dear Howel," murmured Netta, as the nurse covered up the mother and her babe, and the Doctor touched Howel, and told him to come away. He caught sight of the trembling Mrs. Prothero, as he was leaving the room, and a terrible frown passed over his face. She followed him down-stairs, and anticipated his abuse of her, by saying at once, gently, but firmly,

"Howel, I came here at Dr. Richards's summons to my dying child. My husband did not even know I was coming, but neither he nor you could have prevented me at such a time. You cannot turn me from your doors whilst she

is still in danger. When she is out of danger I will go."

"You turned my mother from yours."

"Not I, Howel; and I have never injured you. Leave me till to-morrow, and I will go."

One of the few people in the world for whom Howel had a small amount of respect and affection, was Mrs. Prothero. The simply good, and unaffectedly pious, will sometimes command the regard of the worldly and irreligious.

"If you remain in my house, Mrs. Prothero, it is because you have been consistently kind to me, and received my mother. As to your husband, I would—."

"Not to me, Howel, if you please I can hear nothing against him. You must remember the provocation, and try to forgive and forget as I do. But thank you for letting me stay with Netta. I have so longed and prayed to see her again, and it has been brought about for me."

Mrs. Prothero remained one clear day and two nights longer at Abertewey. As Netta was quite out of danger before that time had expired, she thought it right to go home, both on

Howel's account and her own husband's, whose anger she would have to allay. During her stay with Netta she lost no opportunity to work gently on the mind of her child, now opened and softened by her late trials. She found, with grief, what she had always feared, that Howel and Netta were not happy together; that he was frequently morose and unkind, and that she was passionate and revengeful. This oked out in Netta's confessions to her mother, for Howel was attentive and affectionate during her illness. Mrs. Prothero entreated her to be gentle and obedient. Earnestly did she speak to her of religion, trying to recal the lessons of her childhood; and with tears poor Netta promised everything. Particularly she promised to read her Bible. Her mother was shocked that the Book was not to be found in her bedroom. She put a little Testament that she always carried in her pocket under her child's pillow. It was lined, and underlined by her own hand, and she fondly hoped she might read it for her sake.

Netta was so loving, gentle, and teachable with her mother—blamed herself so severely

for having displeased her and her father—sent so many messages to him, and seemed so desirous of obtaining his forgiveness, that Mrs. Prothero hoped everything.

It was a hard struggle to part again with that dear child, and to kiss the little grandchild for the last time, perhaps, for years—she would not believe for ever; but both she and Netta were obliged to put a brave face upon it, in order not to displease Howel, already suspicious of their conversations.

"You see Netta has all the grandest lady could desire," said Howel, before Mrs. Prothero left.

"Oh, yes! I hope you will be happy," was the reply. Mrs. Prothero had never given a thought to the grandeur by which she was surrounded.

"Why not? Does Netta complain?" said Howel.

"No, no; she says you are very good, and let her have all she wants; but, Howel, riches may not always bring happiness, and we must try to look beyond the perishable things of life for it."

"Pshaw!" said Howel, impatiently; "you know, aunt, I hate that sort of cant."

Soon after she left Abertewey, Colonel Vaughan called. Howel and he had a long conversation, the purport of which was, that the Colonel wished to come himself to reside at Abertewey at the end of Howel's term of two years; and Howel was quite ready and willing to give it up to him, saying that he meant to purchase a house in town—in Belgravia, of course—and to reside there until he could meet with a property that he could purchase.

Howel told Netta that he was tired of the neighbourhood already, it was so stupid; and that London, and a country house in some English county, would be far preferable to living in such a dull part of the world. She quite agreed with him, and had her own reasons for being glad to leave Wales. In the first place, she was not at home with the people she met in society, and liked the notion of living where no one would know that she was the daughter of the Protheros of Glanaravon. In the second, Howel would be always at home in London, and never again absent for three

months, she knew not why. Moreover, she longed to be far away from the mother-in-law, who was a sort of spy over all she said or did; and she thought Howel would be kinder to her, when he was at a distance from their kith and kin, whose propinquity seemed to irritate him.

Netta did not stop to consider Howel's real reasons for leaving the country, or imagine for a moment that a man of his, to her, inexhaustible resources, could be induced to do so because he found those resources were not inexhaustible. Neither did she remember that in London he would be in the midst of the gamblers, horse-racers, and spendthrifts who had been helping him to diminish his father's ill-gotten gains, before, and since, he came into possession of them.

During the remainder of his stay in the county, his house was open to sportsmen of every grade. His racers, hunters, hounds, and good dinners were points of union to all the sporting men of the county; and Captain Dancy, Mr. Deep, Sir Samuel Spendall, the Simpsons, Madame Duvet, and many others, again adorned Plas Abertewey. Races and race-

balls, steeple-chases and steeple-chase balls, hunts and hunt-balls, took Howel, Netta, and his friends from place to place, and he and his horses soon became celebrated. The latter ran at all the races. He was a good rider, and rode himself in several steeple-chases; in short, he was declared to be "a capital fellow!" and one, who, if he would only remain in the county, would raise the sporting interest throughout it. As "blessings brighten as they take their flight," so Howel's popularity reached its zenith just as he resigned Abertewey to Colonel Vaughan, and went, with his wife and child, abroad for a few months.

As Freda foretold, bells rang, bonfires blazed, and cannons fired, when the respective owners of Glanaravon and Abertewey brought home their respective brides, which took place in due course. If anybody thought of Miss Gwynne, it was to comment loudly on her conduct in leaving her home, because her father chose to marry again, and lowering herself and her position by going to reside with her former governess, the wife of a curate in the East-end of London. Some few sympathised with her,

but the greater number laughed at Mr. Gwynne, admired Lady Nugent's tact, and blamed Freda.

Those, also, who discussed Colonel Vaughan, as everybody did, thought him a wise man to marry a woman who could at once clear his estate, and enable him to live upon it as his fathers had never lived before him, and welcomed him home with great ardour, and a regular volley of dinner parties.

Thus Lady Mary Nugent and her daughter, with their various worldly and external advantages, and Colonel Vaughan, with his *savoir faire*, had done more for themselves than Freda or Gladys, or Owen or Rowland could have done, with their honesty of purpose, beauty, and intelligence,—in a worldly point of view, I would be understood to mean.

CHAPTER III.

THE SPENDTHRIFT.

We must now run rapidly through the next six years of Howel's and Netta's career.

After spending nearly a year abroad, where Howel amused himself, in addition to his usual diversions, by speculating in some German mines, they came back to England. They went for a time to Spendall Lodge in Yorkshire, on a visit to Sir Samuel Spendall, in order to be in the vicinity of the Doncaster races. Thence they went to Scarborough, where Howel left Netta, her child and maid in a lodging, whilst he attended the various races in other parts of the country.

About this time, Sir John Simpson died, and his son came into his fortune. Howel

immediately bought a handsome house in Belgravia, furnished it expensively, and began life as a London fine gentleman.

It is needless to describe how Howel's income and position in society gradually dwindled down; or more properly, how his means fluctuated according as his horses lost or won, or his various speculations succeeded or failed. Long before his father died, he had mortgaged that father's very mortgages; and had spent a large portion of his wealth in paying off debts of honour, and freeing himself from the Jews, into whose hands he had got before he went to live at Abertewey.

During his four years' residence in London, it was evident that his means fluctuated in some wonderful way. His house was the rendezvous of men of all ranks who were on the turf, and his life was passed in a state of perpetual excitement. Netta did not see much of him, except at their own table, or that of their acquaintances. When she was alone with him, he was either quite silent, or abusive; the career of such a man will be better understood by most of my readers, than described by me.

The resorts of black legs, and the betting-books of men on the turf, the dishonourable payment of so-called debts of honour, the trickery of horse-dealers, horse-trainers, and horse-racers, and the wretched madness of professed gamblers, are things we have all heard of, but of which, happily, comparatively few of us know much, practically.

Howel managed to maintain his reputation as a gentleman and man of large fortune, even when he was, from time to time, on the verge of ruin; and the purchase of Sir Samuel Spendall's property in Yorkshire, when that Baronet was obliged to leave the country for debt, confirmed the opinion of his wealth. Every one did not know that Sir Samuel, like Mr. Simpson, owed him an enormous sum of money, for various bets, loans, and even mortgages, of which Howel kept quite as usurious an account as his father would have done before him, and at which the lawyers of those gentlemen shook their heads, although they could not disprove any item of it. Howel had learnt enough of law to serve his purposes, and to teach him how far he might venture to go, in the matter

of interest and compound interest, with impunity.

Howel's friend, Mr. Deep, was a lawyer by profession. He had duly taken out his stamps, and had chambers in Lincoln's Inn, and did such business as fell in his way amongst his sporting friends.

It was he who had been Howel's attorney in all his dealings with Sir Samuel Spendall, Mr. Simpson and others, and although his reputation was not very good amongst his professional brethren, nothing dishonourable had ever been proved against him.

We will now look into the chambers of this worthy in Lincoln's Inn, and listen to a conversation that is passing between him and Howel, over what appears to be their mid-day potation of brandy and water. Howel's manner is excited, and his face at its darkest; Mr. Deep is calm, and his face smooth as usual.

"You see, we must have money!" says Howel, "I, at least, must have six thousand five hundred pounds before this month is out. I owe that to Dancy, who, of all men in the world, I don't choose to make wait. If I lose

at the Derby, I must have twenty thousand more."

"But the chances are you will win. Alma is pretty safe, I think."

"Yes, if we can manage to drug Magnificent. I think I have little Bill in my power; he will do anything for us. But this six thousand five hundred is the first thing to think of. I have mortgaged Spendall Lodge almost to its value. By the way, are you quite sure that Spendall has nothing against us? They say his mother is paying his debts, and that he will be able to come back."

"Positive; besides he never knows what money he has paid, or what receipts he has had, or what the amount of his mortgages was."

"Simpson, again, I think he is sharper since his father's death. He was regularly frightened when he found what a sum he owed me, and if I hadn't got into a passion, and threatened to call him out for doubting my honour, I believe he would have checked our bill."

"Can't you get more money on your house in town?"

"No; I have tried Levi and Jacobs, and

they wont advance any more without better security."

"Your mother; surely she would help you, if you were to make up a good story."

"No; I ran down to see her the other day, and she had taken offence because she chose to think I had neglected her, and was as obstinate as an old mule. I believe she is getting stingy, too, and says she will keep her money as long as she lives, and then I may do what I like with it."

"What is she worth?"

"Well, I should say by this time, she must have as good as six or seven hundred a year. She hasn't lived up to her income, and what she has doled out to me now and then, hasn't touched the principal. She must have from fifteen to twenty thousand pounds one way and another."

"Ask her to come and visit you; take her about and make much of her, and then seize upon her in an unwary moment. Borrow the money, and say you will pay it back, which you know, you will be able to do, if you have any luck."

"That's a bright idea. The old soul has always been hankering to come to London. Give me a pen and ink directly. Let me see; I know how she likes me to begin. 'Dear and honoured mother.' Faugh! shall we go on in the ancient style? 'I hope this will find you well, as it leaves me at present.' I only wish it would find her — well—I think that will do. I have told her that Netta and I will be delighted to see her, &c., &c. And Netta hates her, too."

"By the way, Jenkins, could not Mrs. Howel Jenkins get Dancy to give in about that money? She is a prime favourite."

"Mrs. Jenkins knows nothing of my money transactions, and certainly would be the last person I should wish to interfere in such a matter. Let us go and post this letter, and then I want to go to Tattersalls. Will you dine with me at the Club at six, and afterwards we will keep our appointment with Dancy, and Lord Dupe; we may make something of the latter, if we cant of the former."

It was nearly two o'clock in the morning when Howel reached his home. His little girl

was ill in the measles, and Netta, feeling anxious about her, had been sitting up with her. When Howel entered the bed-room in which the mother and child were, he began to talk in a loud voice.

"Why on earth don't you go to bed, Netta?"

Netta put her finger on her lips, and pointed to the little bed in which her child was sleeping, then hurried into the next room, a kind of nursery and play-room, and sent the maid who was sitting there into the bed-room. Howel followed her; Netta saw that he had been drinking, and was greatly excited; he never was absolutely intoxicated, but he constantly drank too much.

"Why do you sit up I say, Netta?"

"Because Minette is so feverish; I did not like to leave her."

The child had been called Minette by a French *bonne*, and they had all somehow adopted it as a name; her real name was Victoria.

"You didn't sit up for me, of course?"

"Certainly not; you are not so very agree-

able when you come home, as to make me sit up for you."

"I say, Netta, do you know I have written to invite my mother to come and pay us a visit."

"Your mother! then you must amuse her, for I certainly wont."

"I beg to say you will, and will do everything in your power to make her visit agreeable. It will be worse for you if you do not. What do you mean by always disobeying me?"

"You had better not strike me again, you coward, you! Justine will hear you. She can see and hear, if she can't understand."

"I tell you what, Netta; everything may depend on our reception of my mother—your very living, and mine, and Minette's."

"I don't care about living; I'd rather starve than live the life I do, and if I have Aunt 'Lizbeth, too, I shall run away, I am sure I shall."

"With whom, Madam?"

"With anybody, or nobody; I don't care what becomes of me, since you're so unkind. Perhaps you'd like to see my shoulder that you hurt yesterday; I haven't had the pleasure of

seeing you since. Your shakes and pinches aint very soft, Sir, I assure you."

Netta threw off a portion of the white dressing gown she had on, and displayed her round white neck and shoulder disfigured by a black and blue mark.

"I'll do the same to the other, if you aggravate me any more," said Howel, clenching his teeth, and moving towards Netta.

"Not to-night anyhow," said Netta, running through the door and short passage into her child's bed-room. She knew that he was always sufficiently master of himself not to expose himself before the servants.

"Justine, I shall sleep with Minette to-night; that is to say, I shall lie down on this sofa by her side. You can go to bed as usual," said Netta.

And when Minette and Justine were fast asleep in their respective beds, poor Netta sat and cried the live-long night, with her feet upon the fender, and her eyes fixed upon the almost-extinguished fire.

The following morning, when she was watching her child, Howel came into the room. He

went up to the bed on which Minette lay, and kissed her, and asked her how she did. The little girl looked pleased, and putting her arms round her father's neck, whispered,

"Papa! do you know Mamma has not been in bed all night? Will you tell her I am quite well, and ask her to go to bed?"

"I will, darling. I have a new picture book for you down-stairs. Mamma will come and fetch it. Mamma, will you come and fetch a new book for Minette?"

Netta looked at Howel for the first time, and seeing that his face was tolerably pleasant, followed him out of the room, and down into the dining-room, where his breakfast was awaiting him.

"Netta! you must make my breakfast, and have some with me. Minette is better, and you needn't starve yourself to death," said Howel, sitting down to the breakfast-table.

"Thank you," replied Netta, sulkily. "I can't eat anything, I am a great deal too tired and wretched."

"Netta, I am sorry I hurt you; but you do

aggravate me so; and I have a great deal on my mind."

Netta's face brightened a little.

"Why don't you tell me what you have on your mind, instead of bullying me from morning to night?"

"Because a woman cannot understand such matters. But if I do not get some money this month, we shall be ruined. I have asked my mother up to see whether she will advance it, and that will depend on our treatment of her. Will you be kind to her?"

"I suppose you will give me some of the money, if you get it, to pay servants' wages, and other bills? I am dunned for money from morning to night, and never have a farthing to pay."

"I shall be able to pay everything next month. I am sure of plenty of money."

"And I suppose you want to get money from your mother to pay bets, or something of the sort. Why won't you tell me?"

"Yes; I owe it to *your* friend Dancy. Perhaps you will help me to pay *him*."

"He is no friend of mine. I don't like him;

but he would do more for me than you would, and is kinder too. But I don't want to be under any obligation to him."

"If you wish to keep a house over your head, or me out of a prison, you must either ask him, as a personal favour to let me off the debt, or you must help me to get the money out of my mother."

"Howel, I don't like underhand ways. I don't mind trying to be civil to Aunt 'Lizbeth, provided you tell her exactly how you are situated, and promise me never to bet with Captain Dancy, or borrow money of him again."

"I promise most faithfully."

"And if you can't afford to live in this grand house, Howel, why don't you give it up, and take to the law, or anything to get your living? Perhaps, if you did, we should be happy again. I would rather work like a slave, and not keep a servant, and live in a small lodging, or anything, than see you so altered."

Here Netta began to cry.

"If I get this money from mother, and what I expect from other sources, we shall be all right again, and then— "

"And then, Howel, you will give up horse-racing, and betting, and gambling, and bad company; and think more of Minette and me—your poor unhappy Netta—your wife—your little cousin that you used to say you loved!—oh, Howel! Howel!—that you hate so now, and treat so unkindly."

Netta had been standing by the fire-place hitherto, but at this juncture she went towards Howel, timidly, and kneeling down by his side as he sat at the table, put her hands on his arm, and fixed her tearful eyes on his face.

Howel was touched. We know that there are moments in the lives of the worst of men, when better feelings overcome the evil ones; and Howel was not utterly bad; and now his guardian angel seemed to be making a great effort to redeem him from his sins. He really loved Netta as much as he could love anything. Was she not the only creature in the world who had really loved him?

"Then you do not quite hate me, Netta," he said, putting his arm round her neck, "I thought all the old love was gone."

"No, no, Howel! Dear, dear Howel! I

love you in my heart; but you are so changed —so—so—you don't care for my company now. You never come home, and play, and sing, as you used to do. You never speak to Minette; you never speak to me, except—"

Here Netta leant her head on Howel's knees, and began to sob. He put his hand on her head, smoothed her hair, and, finally, raised her from the ground, and took her in his strong arms to his weak, wicked heart—a heart not wholly depraved, because there was still in it love for his wife.

For a long time she clung to him; her arms round his neck, her cheek to his cheek, her beating heart to his bosom, as if she was afraid that the spell would be broken if once she let go. Howel kissed her pale cheek, wiped those large black eyes, and comforted her as she had never hoped to be comforted again. Vague thoughts entered his mind of the possibility of beginning life afresh—of being a better husband and father—of giving up his wild, sinful courses. "Shall the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots."

"I will do anything, Howel, darling—any-

thing you wish," suddenly murmured Netta, returning his caresses, "only you will promise never to be unkind again. I will beg, starve for you as long as you love me; but you know I am hot-tempered, and when you are cross I get angry; and then you are violent, and I am hard and sullen and wicked—oh, so wicked! I think I must have lived fifty years in the last five years, Howel, I feel so old and altered. Don't make me so hard-hearted again, Howel bach, or I shall die, indeed I shall; I feel it now at my heart."

Netta put her hand on her heart as she leant against Howel. He raised her and saw that she was of a deathly paleness.

"Don't be—frightened—I have—it—often —only—a spasm," she gasped, as frightened he went to the sideboard, and poured out some brandy into one of the tea-cups, and putting a little water to it, gave it her to drink.

She soon revived, and recovering a little of her old colour again, put her arms round Howel, and thanked him for being so kind. Howel was aware, for the first time for many years, that conscience is not a myth; his smote him.

"Will you stay at home to-day, Howel?" asked Netta. "I will write myself to your mother, if you will."

"Yes, Netta dear, I will. Now, shall we carry the picture-book to Minette?"

"No; you must have your breakfast now, and I will make it. Oh! I am so happy."

"And you do not care for Dancy, Netta?"

"No; I hate him."

Howel kept his word, and stayed at home that one day with Netta and her child, and she wrote that day down on the tablets of her memory, as the brightest spot in six years of trouble and distrust.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FORGER.

In a few days Mrs. Griffith Jenkins arrived in London, equally surprised and delighted by the invitation she had received from her son and daughter-in-law. Netta kept her word, and behaved to her with all the kindness and consideration she could assume. She took her to various places of amusement, and tried to find pleasure herself in scenes that a few years before would have given her great delight; but the forebodings of coming evil hung heavily over her, and she could not rouse herself into her old spirits. Howel was very kind to her when with her; but after that one white day he was not much at home. He went out once or

twice with her and his mother in the evening, and was so very attentive to the latter, that she began to think herself a person of consideration once more.

"There's kind Howels is, Netta fach!" she would say. "There's proud you ought to be to be having such a kind husband. But he don't be looking well, nor you neither. You was looking as pale as those wox figures at Mrs. Tuss's; and seure won was as like you as could be. Ach a fi! I 'ouldn't like to be going again into that little room with all the murderers. And Howel was looking quite pale. But such beauty music, and dresses, and all like life. I thought I should a-screeked out when that man turned and looked at me, and wogged his head, and was nodding, is seure as if he was alive, and he only wox!"

Mrs. Jenkins had been in London about a week, when Howel began carelessly the subject nearest his heart.

"I say, mother fach, how does your money hold out? I dare say you are rich as a Jew by this time."

"Pretty well, Howel. I hope you do be well

off now, and don't be living so gay as you wos."

"Well, mother, if I could just get a few thousands for a couple of weeks I should be as rich as Crœsus, and out of all those difficulties I told you of in another month. Do you know of any one likely to have such a sum to lend?"

"Thousands, Howel! why hundreds wasn't plenty with us, let alone thousands. You do know that there don't be any wan so rich as you in our parts."

"So I am, mother, or rather shall be by and bye. I have lived beyond my income, but I am going to retrench, and if you could only lend me five or six thousand pounds, it would set me right, and I could pay you again in a month."

"Five or six thousand! Why, Howel, I 'ouldn't know how to get it; and I don't cheuse to be reuining myself, and bringing myself down again for nobody."

"Not even for me, mother. To save me from jail perhaps! Ha! ha! I'm sure you wouldn't like to see me in jail; and 'pon my honour I don't know how I shall keep out of it unless you help me."

"And where's the thousands and hundreds of thousands your father was leaving you? Ten years ago come next Jeune he did die, my poor Griffey."

"Now, mother, don't humbug me about that. You know you were glad enough. Only let me have the money, unless you want me to leave the country, never to come back."

"Ach an wyr! How you be talking. You wos frightening me to death. I 'ouldn't mind lending you a few hundreds, but—"

"Hundreds won't do, mother. I must have five thousand six hundred before this week is out, or else— It is impossible you could be cruel enough to see your only son in distress and not help him out of it."

"I have been helping you all your life, Howel. I could lend you wan thousand, and no more, and if you'll promise to be paying me soon."

"One thousand six hundred, mother, I must have that at least."

It would be waste of time to write the reasons urged by Howel to induce his mother to

advance him this money; but after some hours of entreaty, and a promise from him that he would repay it shortly, she consented to write the necessary cheque for that sum. She insisted upon the business being managed through Mr. Rice Rice, her attorney at home, and wrote to him to empower him to raise it as he best could for her son at once.

As she was a poor scribe, and a still worse orthographer, Howel superintended the letter, and when it was written said he would enclose and post it. He was most particular in telling her where and how to write the figures; and before the ink was dry begged her to go to a Devonport, which stood at the other end of the room, for a stamp.

No sooner was her back turned towards him, than with the same pen and ink he made the straight figure *one* into a *four*, and in the cheque which she had written, as well as in the accompanying letter, four thousand six hundred pounds, held the place that one thousand six hundred had held when Mrs. Griffith Jenkins left the table to go to the Devonport.

If Howel trembled, or if his conscience smote

him when he did this dreadful deed, he did not let his mother see it.

"Perhaps, after all you had better direct the letter, mother," he said as he finished sealing it, "if I do it, it will look as if I thought you couldn't write, and you really write just as well as any other lady of your age. I am really very much obliged to you."

When Howel carried the letter out of the room, and went for a few moments into another, he said to himself, "I can pay the whole back after the races, and manage so as to prevent her knowing anything about it. And if the worst come to the worst, I must tell her what I did. She won't expose me, it will be a furious quarrel, and then all will be over. We must keep her here for a long time, and I must get hold of her letters first, and read them to her, and alter them if necessary. Now I must look about for another thousand pounds."

In due course of time the money was procured for Mrs. Jenkins, and paid into a London Bank. Howel took possession of the letter of advice concerning it, and told his mother he had opened it because she was out when it

arrived, and he had not a moment to lose in obtaining the money from the bank. He kissed her, and talked to her, and hurried her and Netta to dress for a drive in the Park with him, until he made her forget to obtain possession of the letter, and so far his fraud prospered.

A few mornings after he had received the money, he had a note from Mr. Deep, containing the intelligence of the return from abroad of Sir Samuel Spendall, and that his attorneys were investigating his affairs. As soon as he received this note, he went by a succession of omnibuses to the East of London, and, as it chanced, into his brother-in-law's parish. In this parish there was a wretched-looking suburb, inhabited principally by Jews, whose houses were, unlike the whited sepulchres metaphorically used in Scripture to describe the hearts of their race—most unclean without, but magnificent within. Into many of these dwellings Howel went in the hope of raising money, but without success. His credit was at zero.

In a desolate, but somewhat more respectable looking house of the same parish, he hired a

couple of rooms, giving his name as Mr. Mills, and paying a week's rent in advance.

He was walking up this street, looking for a cab, when he was suddenly accosted by his brother-in-law, Rowland Prothero.

"You are coming to see me, Howel, I am so glad," said Rowland, as they shook hands.

"Not to-day, I am here on a little business, and in a great hurry."

Howel walked on, but Rowland accompanied him.

"You were all out when I called yesterday," said Rowland, "and I particularly wanted to see you, Howel. When will you be at home?"

"It is impossible to say."

"It is on your own account; it is about Sir Samuel Spendall that I wish to speak."

Howel turned pale, and stood still for a moment, looking round him as he did so to see that no one was listening.

"What of him?"

"Sir Philip told me that he had been heard to say he would dispute your right to his property, for you had acquired it by unfair means."

"The scoundrel!" cried Howel, turning pale. "You have always something agreeable to communicate when we do meet. It is well it is so seldom, Mr. Rowland Prothêro,"

"Oh! Howel; hear me whilst it is yet time, and clear yourself from the imputations to which I cannot shut my ears. My eyes, alas, have been long opened, and I would have helped you, but neither Netta nor you will listen."

"Cab!" shouted Howel, and a cab drew up, and Howel jumped into it, with a "good morning," leaving Rowland looking mournfully after it.

The next morning, Rowland was at Howel's house very early. He found Netta alone, and heard from her, that Howel had not been at home since the previous morning. She had had a line from him, telling her that he was going with Mr. Deep to Greenwich.

Netta looked ill and anxious. Rowland entreated her to tell him freely what made her so unhappy. He said he did not wish to interfere between her and her husband, only to advise her for her good.

Netta burst into tears, and said that Howel

was very kind now; but that she feared there was something on his mind. She knew they were in debt, but that Howel told her all would soon be right.

Rowland begged her to come to him if she were in any difficulty; assured her of his brotherly love and deep interest in her; pointed out her path of duty to her, and urged her to be patient with her husband whatever might happen, and to endeavour to win him to better courses; then left her with a heavy heart and a promise to return on the morrow. He was obliged to be at home that evening for a service in the church.

Late at night Howel returned, anxious and pale. Netta and Mrs. Griffey had been to see Albert Smith's entertainment, and the latter was in a great state of descriptive excitement, when Howel interrupted her, by saying, "Mother, I am very sorry to seem so unkind and inhospitable, but I am afraid I must ask you to return home to-morrow."

"To-morrow! I am feeling too tired to be up in time to-morrow, and seure! if you 'on't give your own mother a home for as long as

she do like to stay, there's my Lady Simpson who is asking me there, and—."

"Impossible, mother, I must see you off for Wales. I am in great trouble about money, and I must leave to-morrow myself or shall be in jail."

"Name o' goodness, Howel, what wos you doing with what I did give you."

"Never mind; only, if anything is said to you about that money by anyone, take care what you say in answer. Don't answer at all, indeed, or it may ruin you and me. Now you must pack up your things to be ready for the first train. Tell the servants—I will—that you are summoned home by a telegraphic message."

Howel impelled his mother up-stairs, and then said to Netta, who was standing looking very pale, with her hand on her heart.

"Netta, you must fill your pockets, and every corner of your dress that will contain them, with such jewels and plate as are of value. Money, I fear, there is none, unless my mother has any. Send the servants to bed, and do this when all is quiet. I am liable to

be arrested for debt, and do not know when it may, or may not, take place. Have a cab to-morrow morning, and send my mother to the station; then take Minette, at your usual hour through the Park to Hyde Park Corner. Start about ten. I will meet you. I must not stay here to-night; indeed, I must not stay longer."

Netta threw her arms round Howel's neck, and entreated him not to leave her.

"Netta, don't be a fool. You don't want to ruin me, do you?"

Netta withdrew her arms, and stood like a statue before Howel.

"You needn't look so frightened; it will be all right in a few weeks. To-morrow at ten, remember."

Howel kissed her, and again left the house.

Poor Netta set about the work that was appointed her mechanically. First of all, however, she went into her mother-in-law's room, and assisted her to pack. Mrs. Griffey was by turns indignant, alarmed, and sorrowful; but finding that she must depart, and that some real difficulty existed, she made no further

resistance. Finding that Netta had, literally, no money, she gave her a ten pound note, under a faithful promise that she would not transfer it to Howel.

"He do be very good-for-nothing, Netta, and have been spending money enough to buy half London. Tak you care of this, and write you to me. You was very good to me since I was come here."

The kind word was too much for Netta, and she sat down and cried bitterly. Mrs. Griffey tried to comfort her by crying too, and so the night waned away.

The following morning, the cab was sent for, according to Howel's order, and a man-servant ordered to accompany Mrs. Griffith Jenkins to the station, and see her off. Netta had never believed it possible that she could have cried at parting with her mother-in-law; but after she left the house, she wrung her hands in despair, and wept as if she had lost her last earthly friend.

Still, she thought, Howel is kind, and loves me, so I will not mind what else happens.

She ordered Justine to dress Minette, whilst

she hurriedly finished such preparations as she could make for her uncertain future. She found that all Howel's jewels were already gone, so she had only to fill her pockets and a bag with the best of her own, and some plate, and lock her drawers. She took it for granted that Howel wanted the jewels for himself, and that she would be obliged, when she returned home, to secure other things.

As she took Minette by the hand, and led her along the handsome square in which they lived, she saw two men look at her very intently, and then exchange some words, apparently about her. In former days, when her bright colour and pretty face attracted the notice of passers-by, this would only have pleased her; now it frightened her.

Before they reached Hyde Park Corner, Howel hailed her from a cab.

"Netta, would you rather go into Wales to my mother, or come with me?" said Howel.

"With you, Howel, anywhere, not into Wales for the world."

Howel leaned back into a corner of the cab, and did not speak again.

Netta did not know where they went, but they got into four cabs in succession, driving a certain distance in one, then paying the driver, then walking into another street, and hailing a fresh vehicle.

At last they reached the far East of London, and found themselves in a dirty, wretched street, amongst a squalid population.

"Give me the bag, and take care of your pocket," said Howel, as they walked along the pavement. "Keep close to me."

They reached the house where Howel had taken a lodging the previous day. He walked through the passage, and bade his wife and child follow him; ascended two pair of stairs, and entered a large and tolerably respectable room.

There was a letter on the table, which he opened at once. It contained the following lines,

"The double S are comparing notes, and various rumours are in circulation amongst that set."

He put the letter in his pocket, and turning to Netta, told her to go into the bed-room, and

take off her own and Minette's bonnet, as they must stay for a little while where they were.

"Not here, papa," said Minette, beginning to cry. "I don't like this place."

"Hold your tongue," said her father, sternly, as Netta led her out of the room.

"Netta," whispered Howel, "our name is Mills here—just for a time only."

When Netta went into the close, dark bedroom, at the back of the sitting-room, she took off her sobbing child's things, took her on her lap, and by degrees soothed her to sleep. She laid her on such a bed as she had assuredly never slept on before, and then returned to Howel.

She stood before him, pale and resolute. He was pacing the room rapidly, and muttering to himself.

"Howel, I must know all! What is the matter? What is to become of us?" she said.

"We must not be seen by our friends for a time, dear Netta, because I am liable to be arrested. Will you mind staying here a day or two alone. I must go away for a short time

on business, but will return and remove you when it is settled. You are better here than at home, as everything will be seized. You are in Rowland's parish, if the worst should come to the worst,; but I don't want him to know anything about me, as it will be all right again by and bye."

"Howel, I asked Captain Dancy not to insist upon that money."

"You did! That is why he let me off with half for another month. What did he say?"

"He said, Howel, that if I would go to France with him, he would forgive your debt."

"And you, Netta?" Howel clenched his fist.

"And I, Howel? I left the room, and have never seen him since. He called after, but I could not speak to him again. How could I?"

"Netta, will you forgive and try to forget how jealous and unkind I have been? In spite of all, I have loved you, Netta. Oh! if I had not taken you away from your happy home!"

"I can bear anything if you love me, Howel. We will try to get through this difficulty, and then you will begin afresh, as a clerk, or any-

thing; and we will be happy—oh, so happy again. Happier than ever!"

Netta smiled through her tears, whilst Howel groaned aloud.

"Think kindly of me, Netta; don't let them make you hate me. I care for no one else in the world. If I send for you, will you come to me, supposing I cannot come myself?"

"Anywhere! anywhere!"

Netta put her arms around her husband, and sobbed aloud.

By and bye, some refreshments that Howel had ordered, came up. The landlady appeared, who seemed a quiet, meek-looking woman.

"I shall be obliged to leave Mrs. Mills and the little girl for a day or two," said Howel. "You will see they are attended to, I hope."

"Yes, Sir," said the landlady, looking, and, doubtless, feeling astonished at the sort of person Netta was, so pretty and well-dressed.

That evening, another letter arrived from Mr. Deep, which told Howel very plainly that writs were issued against him, and that his bills, cheques, betting debts, and affairs generally, were being questioned by his friends. There

was, also, rather more than a hint of his being suspected of forgery.

He went out as soon as he had received that letter, and did not return until past midnight. Netta awaited him in an agony of terror, lest he should return no more.

He gave Netta ten pounds, and told her on no account to disclose her real name, or give a clue to his having been with her in those lodgings, if she should see Rowland.

"But you will be back soon?" said poor Netta.

"In a few days, I hope, or else I will send for you. I must leave to-morrow morning at daybreak."

A few weeks ago, and neither husband nor wife would have cared how long the separation might be, now it seemed death for each to part.

Howel kissed his child again and again, as she lay sleeping in her dingy bed, and held Netta long in his arms. The only human being who really loved him! Him, weak, wild, sinful, godless! yet with one divine spark rekindling in his breast—the spark of human love.

He laid his wife, fainting, by the side of her

child on the bed, bathed her temples with water until he saw that she would revive, and then rushed out into the dirty streets, under the misty, murky morning sky, a reckless and miserable man.

CHAPTER V.

THE ACCOUNTANT.

"I NEVER shall get through these accounts!" is the soliloquy of Miss Gwynne, to whom we return with much pleasure, on my part, at least, after a separation of six years.

She is seated in a gloomy, but comfortable dining-room, in a house situated in one of the squares at the East-end of London. We left her in her large, airy, country home, looking out upon a beautiful view of hill and valley—we find her in a close, dark square, with nothing to enliven the scene without but a few dingy shrubs, a row of tall, gaunt houses, and a smoke-discoloured, soot-filled atmosphere. We left her unhappy and discontented—we find her happy

and contented. We left her with a mind harassed by uncertain plans, disappointed hopes, and humbled pride—we find her with a mind strengthened by good purposes, holy aspirations, and prayers for humility. Still, we left her, and find her Winifred Gwynne. She has not lost her idiosyncrasy.

Reader, be not hasty to pronounce upon the suddenness of these changes. Six years spent, principally, amongst the earnest-minded, laborious clergy of London and their families, in the heart of the most wretched, squalid parish, amongst the lowest, most depraved, most ignorant, most utterly miserable set of people in England, would sober the most thoughtless woman in the world, provided she had a heart. And Freda has not only a heart, but one earnestly desirous of doing good.

She has found vent for her energy, occupation for her time, a bank for all the money she possesses; therefore we find her in the midst of papers covered with figures, containing accounts of ragged-schools, which she is labouring to reckon up, in the simplest of morning-dresses, without ornament or extraneous adornment.

She is somewhat paler and thinner than she used to be amongst the breezy hills of Wales, but her eyes are brighter, and the expression of her countenance is gentler.

"How stupid I am!" she exclaims. "Gladys would reckon them up directly, but she is at the school; and I am ashamed to ask Nita, with all her accounts"

She pauses a moment and lays down her pen. Her eyes fall upon an unopened letter.

"And I declare I have not broken the seal of my own father's letter," she mutters, performing this duty as she does so, and running through it with occasional comments.

"'We hope you will come and spend Christmas—' I suppose I must—'and see your little brother, who longs to see sister Freda again—' Humph! but who cut her out of Glanaravon Park and all thereto belonging, though he certainly is a dear little man. 'Her ladyship quite well, and desires her love.'—I suppose I ought to be glad, and try to return the love.—'Mrs. Gwynne Vaughan and her children were here yesterday. She asked for you, and the little ones wished to know when

you were coming home—' I am much obliged to her, and am afraid I am not too anxious to see either her or her husband, in spite of their civility.—'Little Harold is really a wonderful child! He begins to spell already!'—So like my good father. Well, I ought to be thankful he is happy, and that it all turned out so much better than I expected. But I can't help feeling a kind of wicked disappointment when I think that Lady Mary should be quite as good a tactitian as a second wife, as she was before she married again. But I hope I am happy that she makes poor papa comfortable, and doesn't worry him to death. I don't think he loves her now, half as well as he does me; still, perhaps she suits him better, because she manages him, and I never could. But the *tyfydd** is a dear little fellow, and I am really fond of him."

Miss Gwynne's soliloquy is cut short by a rap at the door, followed by the entrance of Rowland Prothero, who says, as he bows and seems about to retreat, "I beg your pardon—I was told Mr. Jones was here."

* Welsh for heir.

"Oh, do come in!" says Miss Gwynne, rising, and advancing to meet Rowland, "I cannot get through these accounts. I have been reckoning and reckoning ever since breakfast, and they will not come right. I should be so much obliged to you if you would just look them over for me."

Rowland seated himself at Freda's desk, and began at once to do her bidding. The ragged-school was the one in which he was so much interested, and that he had been instrumental in establishing.

Whilst Miss Gwynne had been living with her friend, Mrs. Jones, she had seen a great deal of Rowland; they had, in fact, been thrown much together. At first, Rowland ceased to come to consult the Jones's, or to spend his few spare hours with them, when he heard that Freda was there; and, of course, they and she understood and respected his reasons for absenting himself; but in the course of time they met at Sir Philip Payne Perry's, at his rector's, and elsewhere, and his reserve slightly wore off. When Freda began to assist Mrs. Jones in her parish work, and threw herself, heart and soul,

into the ragged-school, they met of necessity very frequently. Freda was so studiously polite in her manners to him, and so careful to avoid every subject that would recall their old relations at Glanaravon, that he gradually felt more at his ease with her, and it ended by his resuming his old, friendly intercourse with Mr. and Mrs. Jones. But Freda knew well that, in spite of her best efforts to propitiate him, he never forgot those words, "Do you know who I am, and who you are?" He was always gentleman-like, always kind, always ready to do any thing she asked him, but he never relaxed the somewhat formal respect of his manner. In society, he was quite different with every one else to what he was with her. With the Perrys he was as much at ease as if he were their own son; and they seemed almost to consider him as such. At his rector's he was the life of their little circle, and might have been, Freda shrewdly suspected, united to it by a link closer than that of curate, had he so chosen; for there was a very pretty daughter who evidently looked upon him with favourable eyes. Amongst the respectable portion of his flock he was a general favourite,

and all the young ladies, as young ladies will, worked with and for him; not only in the matter of schools, but in slippers and purses. What was still more clear and satisfactory to Freda was, that he made way amongst the miserable poor.

The ragged-school children loved him, and through them, he got at the hearts of some of their degraded parents. His seemed a labour of love with every one but her. She received his marked politeness and nothing more. But he interested her daily. Some new trait of character would break out—some little touch of deep feeling—some symptom of a highly sensitive nature, which told her how much he must have felt her cutting words. He was proud, too, and she liked him for it, although she was striving to humble her own pride. What would she not have given to have recalled those words! The Rowland Prothero of London, esteemed and loved by the wise and good, for his unpretending but strenuous parochial labours, his clear, forcible, but very simple preaching—was to her quite a different person from him of Glanaravon Farm, the son of her father's tenant. In

short they were no longer identical. As she was no longer the heiress of Glanaravon, but simply Miss Gwynne, Mrs. Jones's friend—so he was Mr. Rowland Prothero, a respectable and respected London clergyman.

And these are the relations under which they appear, sitting near one another over the accounts of the ragged-school, which Freda has undertaken to keep.

"I think there is a slight fault here, Miss Gwynne," he says, pointing out an error in calculation.

"Of course, I never had a head for figures, and Mrs. Jones could never get me to do my sums."

"Still, the account is quite right in the main, the errors were in the adding up, and it is rightly balanced."

"Thank you, I am so very much obliged to you. I should never have got through them. And now, will you tell me of those wretched people that Mr. Jones would not let me go and see."

"I gave them the money you kindly sent or, at least, laid it out for them, as they would

have spent it in gin, and they are already more comfortable ; but the father is gone away, and the mother apparently dying."

"Is there no way of alleviating all this wretchedness ?"

"I fear none. Sin is at the root, and as long as the present world lasts, there must be misery with it."

Rowland spoke these words in an unusually melancholy and depressed tone of voice, which caused Miss Gwynne to look up from the papers, directly at him. He was paler than usual, and his lip quivered. He met her glance, and making an effort to rise, said hastily,

"Can I have the honour of doing anything more for you, Miss Gwynne. I am sure I can return you the thanks of the committee, indeed of every one concerned for—"

"I want no thanks, I deserve no thanks from any one ; are you ill, Mr. Rowland ? You have been in some of those dreadful haunts, and they have upset you. May I get you something ?"

"Thank you, I am quite well." Rowland's lip quivered still more, and he grew still less

calm, as he again met Miss Gwynne's eye fixed on him with evident interest.

"I am sure you are ill; you must allow me the privilege of a parishioner, if not of an old friend, and let me ask what is the matter?"

Her manner was so kind, that Rowland's reserve was for a moment overcome.

"Thank you, Miss Gwynne, my poor sister."

"Yes, what of her? I assure you I am truly interested for her; poor Netta!"

"I fear she is in serious trouble, I scarcely know what myself as yet; but she, her husband and child, have left their house, and Howel's creditors have taken posseesion of all his effects. No one knows where they are gone, or what is to become of them."

Rowland had not the courage to tell Miss Gwynne that the police were searching for Howel right and left upon a charge of forgery.

"Poor Netta! I am very, very sorry. What can have reduced him to this?"

"Gaming, horse-racing, speculating! These will waste the largest fortune, and ruin the fairest hopes. But he deserves it all, only my

poor sister is the victim, and the respectability of an honest name is impeached."

"Oh no—poor Netta's hasty marriage and wilful temper were the causes of her trouble, it can have nothing to do with your family; besides, many people of high family and position are obliged to fly for debt."

"That is dishonour enough, Miss Gwynne, but this—this is worse; Howel is suspected of—of forgery."

Rowland gave Miss Gwynne one quick, searching glance as he said that word, and then rose to go. She rose, too, but putting out her hands, and looking him full in the face, kindly and gently, she said,

"Mr. Prothero, I am very sorry for you; for Netta; for all! But if this is true, the sin and the shame will rest with him, who caused them—it cannot fall on you or yours."

Rowland shook the offered hand, and then left the room.

In the hall he met Gladys, who had just come in from the school. Frisk was barking, and jumping about her with great animation, not having grown, as Freda foretold, a useless

and fat London dog. When Rowland appeared, he transferred his attentions to him, and looked much disappointed at receiving none in return.

Rowland shook hands with Gladys, and asked her to come with him into Mr. Jones's little study, where he told her, more clearly than he had told Miss Gwynne, what he knew of Howel and Netta.

He said that he had been to their house the previous day in the afternoon, and had found it occupied by Sheriff's officers, and policemen, who were trying, in vain, to ascertain from the servants where their master and mistress were. All that they knew was, that their master did not sleep in the house the previous night, and that their mistress left it that morning. Rowland had waited until late at night, but no further intelligence was gained.

He gleaned that Howel was accused of having forged cheques at different times, to a very large amount, in the names both of Sir Samuel Spendall and Sir Horatio Simpson. The frauds had been discovered through a cheque on the latter's bank, purporting to be written by him

for five hundred pounds, received by Howel a few weeks before. Sir Horatio Simpson having gone himself to his bankers for some money, it was found that he had overdrawn his account, and, upon examining his late cheques, he utterly disclaimed that of Howel, and declared it forged. The result of this was a general examination of his banking accounts for the last four years, and the discovery of forgeries by alteration of figures and forged signatures, to the amount of some five or six thousand pounds.

At the same time, Sir Samuel Spendall's attorneys found, from a rigid examination of that Baronet's affairs, that Rowland's claim on him did not amount to two thirds of his demand, and that various signatures to betting debts, and loans of money, &c., were forgeries.

In addition to this, Howel's own debts, both on the turf and to his tradesmen, were enormous, and ignominy surrounded him on all sides.

Rowland groaned aloud as he told Gladys these horrible truths, and Gladys had no words of comfort; all she could say was,

"It is not poor Miss Netta's fault; it is not yours, Mr. Rowland, or that of any one belonging to you."

"But the shame, Gladys; you know my father, it will be his death."

"Oh no, Sir, he always expected something of the kind, I have often heard him say so. If we could only find Mrs. Jenkins and her child, it would not be so bad."

Mr. Jones came in, and Gladys left the room, and went to Miss Gwynne.

Gladys has become the friend and confidential adviser of every member of that small household; no one but herself considers her as a servant. She acts as housekeeper for Mrs. Jones, maid to Miss Gwynne, school teacher and district visitor to Mr. Jones and Rowland, almoner and confidante to all. Gladys, within doors, Miss Gladys, without; no one knows that she has any other name. In spite of her beauty, her youth, her timidity, she goes amongst scenes and people, from whom most women, even the best, would shrink, and seems to bear about with her a charmed life and invisible strength that nothing can destroy.

Amongst the wretched Irish who inhabit a portion of that vast, depraved parish, she has an influence that even the clergy cannot boast, due to her Irish extraction and slight accent; and the sufferings she has herself undergone from gaunt famine and grim death, make her keenly alive to their wants and feelings. No one has such power over the poor untutored heathen children of the ragged-school, as she has, and no one loves them as she does. She, too, like her mistress, has found her vocation in their city home; who cannot find a vocation in any home, if they will only look around them for it?

Whilst Rowland and Mr. Jones discuss the sad news Rowland has to tell, Miss Gwynne, Mrs. Jones, and Gladys discuss it also, for Mrs. Jones has joined the pair in the dining-room. There is but one feeling in that household; sorrow for Rowland and his family, anxiety about Netta. Tears are in the eyes of all those true-hearted women, as they think of the probable fate of the once bright little belle of their country neighbourhood, deserted, perhaps, amongst the wild wildernesses of London houses.

Mr. Jones endeavours to console Rowland, by suggesting that if Netta is left by her husband, she will surely fall back upon her brother; and when he has exhausted what little portion of hope he can inspire, Rowland turns resolutely to subjects that must be attended to, even if his heart were breaking from sorrow.

The respected rector of that large parish was in very uncertain health, and had gone abroad with his family for three months, leaving all the parochial duties in the hands of his two curates. They were heavy enough for three clergymen, but Mr. Jones and Rowland found them almost too weighty for them, unassisted by their chief; however, they fought manfully through them, Sundays and week days.

Rowland refused Mr. and Mrs. Jones's invitation to dinner, and crossing the square, entered his solitary lodging in one of the opposite houses, and began to write to his brother Owen. He told him all that he knew of Howel and Netta, and begged him to break it to their parents as best he might.

When he had finished his letter, he prepared to go out again; his landlady brought him some

luncheon, but he could not touch it. He went first to his ragged-school, and there the sight of those children of crime and infamy, recalled his little niece to his mind, and made his heart sink still lower with the fear of what she might become. Never had he spoken with such feeling to the motley throng that stood about him, as he did that day. Then he had to thread some of the haunts whence those children came, to seek out the miserable parents to whom they had been a sort of introduction, and never before had he experienced so forcibly that he was their brother, even theirs, as now that he knew that his sister's husband was "a thief and a forger;" he could almost fancy that they already pointed to him as belonging, at least, to one as degraded as themselves.

That evening he read prayers and lectured in one of the churches. He lectured extempore, and it was noted by all his congregation that more than once his feelings nearly overcame him. They thought and talked of the fact, when, at a later period, they heard of his family sorrow. But they all said that his "word was

with power," and there was many a moist eye amongst them as he warned them, in language made even more forcible than usual by the events of the day, against the pleasures and vices of the world.

After the service, many of the school-teachers and scripture-readers met him in the vestry to have their work allotted, and their word of advice and encouragement. Again he pressed upon them the subject brought home to his heart, that of resisting in youth the "temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil."

His youthful regiment of soldiers talked to one another afterwards of the earnestness and piety of him who led them on in their battle against evil, and prayed to become more like one who was so devoted to "fighting that good fight" which they had enlisted to join in.

Tired and exhausted Rowland returned to his lodging. He tried to review the events of the day, but in doing so fairly broke down. He had been striving to keep his mind in subjection by beating down his monster enemy, pride, for the last six years; but he found that he was

still rampant within him. It was not simply the grief for a sister's distress and a brother-in-law's sin that he felt, but strong personal mortification. How could he think of self, of the Perrys, of his rector, of his family, of his parishioners and their opinion, above all, how could he think of Miss Gwynne who disdained him, at a time when every personal feeling ought to be merged into sympathy with others? He prayed and struggled against the tempter, prayed for his sister, above all for Howel, in words too fervent and holy for these pages; and went to bed and slept from mere exhaustion of mind and body. Little did Netta think when she made that disobedient step into the dark future, what misery it would bring upon all who loved her!

Pause then, and think, all you young women, who may be meditating a similar course, even whilst reading this story, or may be at issue with your parents, because their experience shews them a future which your inexperience cannot show you! pause and think that Netta is no fictitious character, her story no mere creation of an author's brain, but the portrait

and history of one out of hundreds of wilful daughters brought to shame and grief, and bringing all belonging to them to shame and grief, by an unblessed and unholy marriage.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FORGER'S WIFE.

Days and weeks passed and there was no intelligence of Netta. Rowland had heard from Owen of the domestic misery at home, and also that he had been to see Mrs. Griffith Jenkins, who disclaimed all knowledge of her son's hiding place, or what had become of his wife and child. Her own grief was too real to allow even the sceptical Owen to doubt it; and when in addition, she gave him to understand that she, too, was nearly ruined by Howel's forgeries, but that she would die rather than tell any one else of it, he could only pity the wretched mother who had, by her bad example and

teaching, helped to train her son for the ruin into which he had fallen.

Rowland heard that Mr. Deep had been arrested upon a charge of abetting Howel in his crimes, and that a search-warrant for the examination of his papers had brought to light other nefarious dealings, as well as an unsigned letter, supposed to be in Howel's writing, intimating his intention of going to America. This had caused enquiries to be made at the docks, and police emissaries to be dispatched forthwith to America. A person answering his description had sailed for that continent from Southampton the day after Howel left his house; but unaccompanied by wife or child.

Strange to say, that the Epsom races had come off, and that Howel's horse, Magnificent, had actually won the Derby stakes! Too late! save for his creditors, and those he had defrauded. Still, doubtless, one more bitter drop in the cup of his despair, wherever he might chance to be drinking it.

All that he had left behind him was sold, hunters inclusive, and this Magnificent alone, particularly after the Derby, yielded a princely

fortune. Too late, either for further crimes, or poor Netta's hoped-for reformation !

It was hard work for Rowland to go through his heavy parochial duties with this great misfortune hanging over his head. But if the sympathy and kindness of friends could help him in his work, and support him under the pressure of anxiety, he was helped and supported. Still it was evident to all that he fled from society, and in spite of the delicate tact of the Jones's and Freda, he had scarcely been near them since that first day. Whether it was pride or susceptibility, he could scarcely tell himself, but he could not bring himself to thrust his sorrow and those of his family upon others. He caused every possible search to be made, through the police and otherwise, for Netta, but in vain.

But Providence answered his prayers, when his own efforts seemed fruitless, and that through the instrumentality of one of the poor children, for whose benefit he had exerted such talents as God had given him.

Some four years before, a miserable girl of eleven years old, had become one of his ragged-

school children. I say *his*, because even his Rector allowed him the merit of establishing the school. Through this child, Rowland became acquainted with her mother, a wretched starving widow, living in squalor and iniquity. Miss Gwynne had helped her temporally, Rowland spiritually, and when she had died, about a year ago, he had strong hopes that much suffering had helped on a sincere repentance.

Her little girl was one of the many examples of the blessed effects of a ragged-school. At her mother's death she was fifteen years old, teachable and anxious to be taught. Rowland prevailed on a respectable woman—the lodging-house keeper, in whose house Netta had found a refuge, to try her as a servant, and she had turned out well.

So it was that this girl, having an idea that Rowland could effect wonders, waited for him one Sunday evening after service, and asked if she might speak with him. She told him, with a long preface of apologies, that she did not know if she was right in saying what she was going to say—but that there was a poor lady in her mistress's second-floor, who was very ill—out of her

mind she thought, and who hadn't a friend in the world. The lady had forbidden her mistress from speaking to any doctor or clergyman about her, but she had not forbidden her. And indeed it seemed almost worse to see a lady in such trouble and sickness than it did those who were used to it, as she, and the like of her had been, and would be still, but for Mr. Prothero.

"What is her name?" asked Rowland, eagerly.

"Mrs. Mills, Sir."

Rowland's sudden hope fell.

"And she has a little girl, Sir, who isn't well either, and who does nothing but cry and moan."

"What is her name?"

"Her mamma calls her Minette, or some such name, Sir."

"I will come with you now," said Rowland, in great agitation. "Make haste—I suppose she has been with you some time."

"More than a month, Sir, and she is always expecting some one to come; and no one comes."

Rowland strode on, fast—faster than he had

once before walked with Gladys—heedless of everything around him. In about a quarter of an hour he and the little girl reached the lodging-house.

"You will tell Missus how it was, please, Sir, I don't think she can be angry, Sir."

"I am sure she will not be angry, tell her that I want to see her."

Mrs Saunders, the landlady, came at once.

Rowland enquired into the particulars of Netta's arrival at her house, her illness, &c., and heard what we already know of Howel's sudden departure; and the following account, in addition, of the month Netta had spent since he left her.

"The morning after Mr. Mills left, Sir," said the landlady, "Mrs. Mills did not ring for breakfast, or show any sign of being up. I waited for a long time, and then I went and listened at the bed-room door. I heard a kind of moaning, and was so frightened, I made so bold as to go in. I found the poor lady lying down on the bed, beside the little girl, who was still asleep. She seemed more dead than alive, and looked at me terrified-like, as if she didn't

know who was coming in. When she saw me, she tried to get up and look cheerful, and to give account of her never having undressed. I went and made her some tea, and got her to go into the sitting-room by the fire which the girl lighted, for she was as cold as death. Then I dressed the little girl, who awoke and began to cry when she saw how pale her mamma looked, and I told her to try to make her mamma eat and drink. And the little dear, like an angel as she is, began to comfort her mother, and to coax her, and when I saw the poor lady begin to shed tears over the child I went away.

"Ever since that morning, Sir, she has been in a kind of a dream. She does nothing but look out of the window, up and down the street, as if she was expecting some one, and whenever there is a step on the stairs, she runs to the door and peeps out. And then, when the postman's knock is heard, she starts, turns red, turns pale, and puts her hand on her heart. I am sure she has heart complaint, and I asked her to let me send for a doctor, but she wouldn't hear of it. Sometimes I think she's a little crazed. Once I mentioned the clergy, and asked if she wouldn't

like to see one, and said you and Mr. Jones, Sir, were very kind gentlemen. She started up, and said, 'hush ! hush !—not for worlds—not for worlds ! Mr. Mills will soon be back !' She gave me a ten pound note to change twice—and I was obliged to buy everything for her and the little girl, for they hadn't a rag with them, except what they stood up in. I was as careful as I could be, but the money went, and now she talks of selling some jewels and things she brought with her. Oh, Sir ! If you could find their friends !"

As may be supposed, Rowland had some difficulty in controlling his emotion, during this recital. When Mrs. Saunders paused, he said, "I have every reason to believe that I know this poor lady, and, if you will trust me to go to her, I am sure that I shall be of service. I must go quite alone. You may depend upon my having a right to do this."

"Whatever you do, Sir, is sure to be right and kind. If you will take it upon yourself, I shall be only too glad. You know the room, Sir; the one where you used to go and see my poor husband."

Rowland was up-stairs immediately. Almost before he reached the door, a pale, haggard face peered out of it.

"It is—it is Howel!" cried poor Netta, rushing into the gloomy passage, and throwing her arms round Rowland's neck.

"No, Netta—dearest Netta! it is I, Rowland —your brother," said Rowland, supporting his fainting sister back into the room.

"Uncle! Uncle Rowland! I am so glad!" exclaimed a little voice, as Minette ran towards him and clasped his knees.

As the glare of the gas, by which the room was lighted, fell upon Netta's face, Rowland half believed that it was the corpse of his once blooming sister that he was placing on the sofa.

"Fetch some water, Minette, darling," said Rowland, supporting Netta.

"This is what mamma takes," said the child, bringing Rowland a small bottle labelled "Prussic acid" from the bedroom.

"I cannot give her this; is there no wine?"

The little girl went to an old chiffonier, and brought a decanter with wine in it. Rowland

poured some down Netta's throat, and she recovered.

"Rowland, is it you? Not—not—," muttered Netta, as she strove to rise. "I think you had better go. Perhaps, when he comes, he won't like—oh, my heart!"

"Be calm, dear Netta; I will do nothing you dislike. If Howel comes back, I will go away directly. I will be most careful of what I say. You need not fear me, Netta; your brother who loves you so dearly."

"You won't go away again, uncle, will you?" said the pale, little Minette, climbing on Rowland's knee and nestling her head in his bosom; "or will you take mamma and me away from this nasty place?"

"No, dear, Uncle Rowland will not leave you; he is so very glad to find you."

Tears, actual tears filled Rowland's eyes as he kissed the brow of the child, who was soon fast asleep in his arms, and as he held Netta's thin hand, and looked at her bewildered face.

"Did you say you loved me, Rowland?" asked Netta, looking at him with a strange, wandering glance, whilst large tears rolled down

her cheeks. "I don't think I deserve any one's love, do I? Is mother vexed that I have been away so long?"

"Yes, dear; and you must come home at once. You must come to me first, to get strong, and then—"

"Hush! hush! No; I cannot leave this house—I will not; never, never till Howel comes, or sends for me. Isn't that some one on the stairs?"

"I will see, dear."

"No, not you—not you."

"It is some one gone to the next floor. Lie still, dear Netta."

"It is nice having you, Rowland; but if he should come—"

"I would go away. You are ill, Netta. Tell me what is the matter with you!"

Rowland was feeling Netta's pulse, and found that they were too rapid to be counted, whilst he could, literally, hear the pulsation of her heart.

"I don't know; something at my heart; and—and—my head, just here—at the top. It is so burning, like fire."

"We must nurse you, Netta. If you would only come to my lodgings!"

"Hush! hush! not for the world. I will stay here till—I am sure that is a step."

"No, dear! Try to be calm and sleep for half an hour, whilst I go and make some arrangements."

"Do you think he will come to-night?"

"I scarcely think he can, Netta. You know he is obliged to hide, dear; do you not? for—"

"Yes, yes! he told me, for a few days, for debt, and then he would come back. But he didn't murder Captain Dancy, did he?"

Netta started up, and fixed her eyes wildly on her brother.

"No! I assure you, no! I saw some one who saw Captain Dancy yesterday."

"Thank God! thank God!"

"And, Netta, I do not think he can venture to come back just yet; so you must try to get well, for all our sakes."

"Yes, I will, that I may go to him. I will sleep now. Put Minette by my side. Poor Minette!"

Rowland laid the child's head on her mother's

lap, and arranged the pillows for Netta, and then went, with a heart full to bursting, to Mrs. Saunders.

"Mrs. Saunders," he said, "I know that I can trust you. The poor lady to whom you have been so kind is my own sister, for whom we have been anxiously searching all this time. I don't know how far secrecy may be necessary, but, at present at least, do not let this fact go beyond yourself. Her husband has reduced her to what you see. I must leave her for half an hour; meanwhile, will you prepare supper, make a cheerful fire, let off the gas, and give us a couple of candles; make the room as home-like as you can, in short. After my sister, and the little girl are gone to bed, put a couple of blankets on the sofa in the sitting-room for me. I cannot leave her to-night."

"Excuse me, Sir," said Mrs. Saunders. "Wouldn't your sleeping here excite observation, if secrecy is necessary. You may depend on my care. Sarah has slept on the sofa for a fortnight, unknown to Mrs. Mills, to be within call."

"Perhaps you are right; but I want to make

my sister fancy she is at home. It might recal her mind, which is evidently wandering. I shall be back soon."

Rowland walked as fast as he could to Mr. Jones's. He found him, his wife, and Freda together in his library.

"I must apologise for coming so late," he began, "but I know you are so kindly interested in my poor sister, that you will excuse me. I have found her and her child, and cannot prevail on her to leave her rooms at Mrs. Saunders', where she is."

Then Rowland told his friends, shortly, how he had found her, and that he feared her mind was in a most uncertain state.

"She evidently does not know her husband's crimes, but thinks he is hiding on account of debt, and is expecting him to fetch her away every moment. I think if we could distract her thoughts from this one subject, she might get better; but she is very ill, bodily as well as mentally."

"Would not the sight of old friends be the best restorative?" suggested Miss Gwynne "Gladys and I could go to her, and as we are

in the habit of visiting the sick in the parish, no suspicion could attach to our being with her; for it would never do, in poor Netta's state, to expose her to inquisitive people connected with her husband's flight."

"Thank you—thank you, Miss Gwynne," said Rowland. "This is what I wished, but scarcely dared to ask."

Miss Gwynne left the room, and returned accompanied by Gladys.

"Gladys says she is ready to go at once, if necessary," said Freda; "and we can do without her, cannot we, Serena?"

"Quite well," said Mrs. Jones, "but it will not do to excite an invalid, and so sudden a visit may not be good for her."

"She must not be left another night without a friend at hand," said Freda, decidedly.

Rowland looked his thanks.

"Could not Mr. Rowland prepare her for my coming? And I could sleep in the sitting-room, and not even see her to-night, but be ready to wait upon her to-morrow morning," said Gladys.

"Yes," said Freda. "If you will go back,

and try to prepare her for Gladys, Mr. Prothero, she shall follow you in a short time."

"I will bring her," said Mr. Jones, "and she can but return, if you cannot prevail on your sister to see her."

Rowland could only press the hands of his kind friends, and hurry back to Netta.

He found her sitting in an old easy-chair, with Minette on a stool at her feet, fast asleep. The child refused to go to bed till "Uncle Rowland" came back. There was a bright fire in the grate, and a supper was spread on a table drawn close to it. Candles replaced the gas-lamp, and the room looked almost cheerful, in spite of its faded red curtains, and dingy furniture.

Netta had a small book in her hand, which she gave Rowland to look at.

"Mother gave me that when I was ill years ago—how long ago? How old is Minette?"

"She must be nearly eight, I think," said Rowland, turning over the small, well-read Testament that had once been his mother's.

"I like that book now, Rowland!" said Netta, "I am so glad you have come back.

It seemed so lonesome when you were gone. Ha! ha! Howel used to say I must say *lonely* and not lonesome. Are you sure he won't come and find you here?"

"Quite sure. And I am going to bring another old friend to see you—you remember Gladys?"

"Gladys? No, I don't remember her. What! The Irish beggar? I don't like her, and she don't like me. I think I was very unkind to her. Yes, I should like to see her once to ask her pardon."

Minette awoke just at this moment, and Rowland took her on his knee, and gave her some supper, and tried to make Netta eat, but it was evident that she had neither appetite nor inclination for food, though she did her best to please her brother.

"This is like old times, Rowland," she said, "I like it better than grandeur. When will Gladys come? Owen told me she saved mother's life. Is it true? Why doesn't mother come?"

"Would you like to see Gladys to-night, Netta?"

"Yes. Will you go and fetch her."

Rowland found Gladys and Mr. Jones in Mrs. Saunders' parlour. Gladys said she would take her bonnet off, that she might meet Netta as she used to do at the farm.

Rowland did not know that Gladys had put on the identical print gown that Netta had given her years ago, and which she had kept carefully, in remembrance of her. This, and a plain cap, transformed her into the Gladys of Netta's recollection, from the Gladys of Miss Gwynne's attiring.

Her heart beat almost as quickly as Netta's, as she entered her room, but she steadied her nerves and voice as she went up to Netta, curtseyed, and said, quite naturally,

"How do you do, Miss Netta?"

Netta put her hand to her brow, as if to clear her memory, and fixed her large bewildered eyes on Gladys. Then she put out her hand, rather condescendingly, with something of the old attempt at superiority, and finally burst into tears.

The tears were so natural, that Rowland and Gladys let them flow on; only the latter

knelt down by poor Netta's side, and taking her hands in hers, pressed them tenderly. Netta threw her arms round Gladys' neck, and kissed her, and called her, "Gladys, Gladys fach!" and said, "You will not leave me."

And thus the once proud little Netta, and the always humble Gladys, clave to one another, as Naomi and Ruth.

Minette got off her uncle's knee, and climbed up into the chair, and put her arms, too, round her mother's neck, and began to cry with her.

Rowland's emotion at this scene, found vent in prayer. Inwardly, he asked that Gladys might be a comfort and support to his dear, wandering, forsaken sister.

When Netta's emotion had worn itself out, Rowland prepared to go, promising to return early on the morrow.

He asked Netta if she would like him to offer up a few words of thanksgiving for their reunion, before he left her, and when she assented, they all knelt together in family prayer. Eight full years had passed since Netta had so knelt before.

When Rowland had departed, Gladys asked Minette if she might put her to bed. The child looked shyly at her, at first, and then allowed her to undress her, and to take her to the close, gloomy bed-room. It was so late, and the child was so tired, that her little head drooped in sleep even before she was undressed, and when Gladys laid her pale cheek on the pillow, she slept soundly at once. Then Gladys returned to the sitting-room, and found Netta at the door, listening.

"Hush! you had better go. I think he is coming," she said.

Gladys withdrew for a moment, till the steps were no longer heard. As long as Netta had been occupied with her brother and Gladys, she seemed to have forgotten the passing sounds, but when left alone she listened as before.

With some difficulty, Gladys prevailed on her to go to bed. Mrs. Jones had given her night-lights, and a slight sleeping potion before she left home, upon the chance of their being wanted; and she put one of the former in the

bed-room, and gave Netta the latter. She sat by her side until she fell asleep, and then returned to the sitting-room, literally "to watch and pray."

CHAPTER VII.

THE SISTER OF CHARITY.

The following morning, soon after eight o'clock, there arrived a basket from Miss Gwynne, containing various meats and condiments, that she thought might be good for Netta and her child, and above all, a nosegay of Glanaravon flowers. Mr. Gwynne had, of late, taken to send his daughter baskets of game, poultry, and other country cheer, to which her particular ally, the old gardener, always added a tin of well-packed flowers. These Miss Gwynne was in the habit of tending and treasuring, as people in large cities alone can tend and treasure flowers, until their last odour and colour departed, and these she now gladly sacrificed to Netta.

It was an October morning, dull and misty. Gladys had kept up the fire, and when Rowland's friend, Sarah, came to clean the room, she found that her work had been done for her.

"Oh, Miss Gladys," said the girl, "why did you?"

"Never mind, Sarah, you get the breakfast things and boiling water, and I will do the rest."

Netta and her child slept late, and so heavily, that Gladys thought they would never awake. She had arranged and re-arranged the room, the breakfast, everything; and was employed in mending a rent in Minette's frock, when she heard the little girl say "Mamma!" she went into the bed-room, and found Minette sitting up in bed, and her mother still sleeping. She washed and dressed the little girl, who seemed to take to her naturally, and then led her into the sitting-room. Her delight was so unbounded at the sight of the breakfast and the flowers on the table, that her exclamations pierced the thin partition, and awoke her mother.

"He is come! he is come!" cried Netta, jumping out of bed, and hastening into the sitting-room in her night-dress, through the door that comunicated with the bed-room.

When Gladys saw the wild excitement of Netta's manner, and the unusual gleam of her eyes, she understood what Rowland meant by saying that her mind was unsettled; when she saw Gladys, she started, and ran back again into the bed-room, whither Gladys followed her. A fit of depression and pain at the heart succeeded, as they always did, this new disappointment; and it was evident to Gladys that the only chance of restoring her to health of mind or body, was by keeping her amused, and distracting her thoughts from her husband.

Minette brought in the flowers, and Gladys ventured to say that they came from Glanaravon, and that Miss Gwynne had sent them. The flowers, or their associations, brought the tears, which were the best outlets for poor Netta's hysterical feelings, and when she had minutely examined each — chrysanthemums, verbinas, salvias, geraniums—she took the one

carnation from the vase, and kissing it, and pressing it to her heart, said,

"This came from mother, how good of her to think of me."

Then she let Gladys help her to dress, and went to the well-stored breakfast-table, sitting down on a chair Gladys placed for her. She seemed to take up the tea-pot mechanically, and began to pour out the tea; Gladys did not attempt to sit down, but waited upon her and Minette as if she were, indeed, the servant she professed to be. Either Netta took this as a matter of course, or was too much absorbed in other thoughts to give it consideration.

"Mamma, I should like Gladys to have some breakfast with us," said Minette, "she must be so hungry. I think she is a lady, mamma; I like her, she is so kind."

"Yes, Gladys, do," said Netta, "you know this is not Abertewey. But where did you get this game?"

"Miss Gwynne sent it, Ma'am, she will come and see you by and bye. I am sure I hear Mr. Rowland's voice on the stairs."

Gladys said this to avoid another start, and

Rowland appeared. Having kissed his sister and niece, and shaken hands with Gladys, he sat down to the breakfast table. Gladys was still standing, but he begged her to sit down, and she did so.

"Miss Gwynne sent me all this, Rowland," said Netta, "except the carnation, that was mother's."

Netta had placed it in her bosom.

"Uncle must have a flower, too, mamma," said Minette jumping up, and taking him a red geranium. "Let me put it into your button-hole, it smells so sweet."

Rowland smiled and coloured, as that sprig of red geranium from Glanaravon was placed in his coat by his litttle niece, and in spite of his better resolutions, when he went home, it was transferred to a glass, and treasured as long as imagination could fancy it a flower.

After breakfast, Gladys asked Netta if Minette might go with her to see Miss Gwynne, as she was obliged to leave for a short time.

"Gladys, you are going away, and would carry away my child, I know you are," said

Netta, "all, all! nobody cares what becomes of me. Why can I not die?"

Minette's arms were round her mother's neck in a moment.

"I will stay, till you return, Gladys," said Rowland.

"She will not come back if once she goes," repeated Netta, "none of them do, except you Rowland. Owen never did—mother never did—Howel—oh! he will! he will!"

"They will both return, dear Netta, only let Minette go."

"No, uncle, I wont leave mamma, never—never!"

Gladys went away alone. Sarah came to clear away the breakfast things, and when Netta was seated in her old arm-chair, Rowland again began to urge her to leave the lodgings she was in, and either come to his, or accept an invitation that he brought her from Mrs. Jones to go to her house.

"I will never leave these rooms, Rowland," she said, solemnly, "until *he* fetches me, or sends for me, or bids me go. He loves me, Rowland, dearly; he said so. Do you know, I

once fancied he did not, and tried not to care for him. But when he was in debt and trouble, it all came back again. And, you know, he is my husband, even if I did run away from home, and I must do as he bids me."

Mrs. Saunders came to say that Mr. Wenlock wanted Rowland.

"Perhaps it is he, Rowland," said Netta.

"No, dear Netta; it is a great friend of mine, a doctor. Will you see him to please me? We all want so much to get you better."

"Yes, if you will not tell him about Howel. I must get well, for it may be a long, long journey. Do you know that I dreamt last night that he sent for me, and that I was to travel thousands of miles before I met him. I must get well, so I will see your friend, Rowland, only don't tell him my name. Minette, go with Mrs. Saunders, whilst mamma sees Uncle Rowland's friend."

Mrs. Saunders took Minette away, and Mr. Wenlock, a gentle-looking, elderly medical man, a great friend of Rowland's, made his appearance.

Netta rose with a little attempt at her Pari-

sian curtsey, and an effort to assume her Abertewey manners; but she soon forgot her grandeur when the doctor spoke to her in a soothing, fatherly way, and won her to confide her long-concealed illness to him. Rowland left them together, and went down to Mrs. Saunders' parlour, to amuse his little niece.

In something less than half-an-hour, he was joined by Mr. Wenlock, who took Minette on his knee, and looked at her thin cheeks and hollow eyes, felt her weak pulse, and asked her many questions.

When she went up-stairs to her mother, Mr. Wenlock said,

"The poor lady is very ill, dangerously, I fear. She must have had some heavy sorrows for years to have reduced her to her present state of nervousness, nearly amounting to insanity, but not quite. This may yet be warded off with great care, total freedom from all excitement, and change of air and scene. She has heart complaint of an alarming nature. This can never be cured; but if her strength can be restored, she may live for years—her natural life, in short—or she may be taken at

any moment. Any sudden shock would probably be fatal."

Rowland had not told Mr. Wenlock that Netta was his sister. When he heard his opinion, so clearly and unreservedly expressed, he was greatly distressed.

"She will not be moved from these lodgings," he said. "She positively refuses. Will it do to oblige her to leave?"

"By no means. But I hear that admirable young woman, whom I call *our* Sister of Charity, Miss Gladys, has undertaken to nurse her. If any one can persuade her to submit to go elsewhere, she will do it. It should be into the country. To her native air, if possible."

Just at this juncture, Gladys returned, and Rowland called her into the consultation. Mr. Wenlock continued,

"Lead her to think of her child, who is also in a most delicate state. Tell her, that change of air, country air, is absolutely necessary for her—which it really is—but she must not be taken from her mother. Distract her mind as much as possible from the trouble, whatever it is, that oppresses it. Had she been left much

longer to herself, she would have quite lost her reason. Let her see such friends as can be trusted to talk to her cheerfully, and to amuse, without wearying her. If you undertake this office, Miss Gladys, you will require all your patience, and more than your natural health; and once undertaken, you must not give it up, for she will get used to you, and depend upon you. Poor thing! poor thing! I have seen many such cases, and never need to enquire much into private history to know their origin. Wicked, morose, unfeeling, cruel husbands, are generally at the root, and God only knows what their victims have to bear. There will be a pretty large account to make up at the Great Day, Mr. Prothero, between man and wife, of marriage vows broken, and feelings outraged."

"And my poor—and Mrs. Mills," said Rowland, "ought, you think, to be removed at once from London?"

"Decidedly, if she can be prevailed upon to go of her own free will, not otherwise. I will see her again to-morrow, and watch her case as long as she remains here. As regards the poor child, Miss Gladys, she, too, must be nursed

and amused, and well-fed. I suppose she has been neglected since the measles that her mother told me of, or else she never was a strong child. Poor little lamb! It would kill her mother if she were to be taken! But, really, I couldn't say—however, we shall see. Good morning. I ought to be elsewhere by this time."

Mr. Wenlock took his departure.

"Miss Gwynne is coming directly, Mr. Rowland," said Gladys, "I suppose I had better tell Mrs. Jenkins so. She has been out all the morning, purchasing everything she thought Mrs. Jenkins and Miss Minette could want, and is going to bring what she has bought, in a cab, herself."

"God bless her!" murmured Rowland. "Gladys, do say, Minette, and not Miss. Why will you not consider yourself as a friend —a sister?"

Why did that quick, bright flush spread so suddenly over Gladys' pale face?

"Thank you, Mr. Rowland, I will. But I cannot forget what I really was, and am."

"You are and have been everything to us all,

and now all our hopes seem to centre in you. Can Miss Gwynne spare you?"

"She proposed my coming herself; but even if she had not, my first duty is to my dear mistress and her children."

"You will receive Miss Gwynne, Gladys. It will be less awkward, I have a hundred things to do. Tell Netta that I will come again."

Rowland went first of all to his lodgings, and wrote a long letter to his father. He told him boldly and plainly what Mr. Wenlock had said; he had already written to his mother the good news of his having found Netta. He asked his father in a straight-forward manner to receive Netta, and to forgive her. He made no comments, preached no sermon. He thought that a statement of facts would have more effect on his father than all his eloquence, or all the texts of the Bible, every one of which his father knew as well as he did. He also began to feel it was not for him to lecture and reprimand a parent, even though he knew that parent to be in the wrong. As he folded his manly and affectionate letter, he prayed for a blessing upon it, and went to preach and pray with many members of

his flock, who, alas, knew not, like his father, those blessed texts, which teach us to "forgive as we hope to be forgiven."

Later in the afternoon he went to Netta again; he found Miss Gwynne with her, cloak and bonnet thrown off, and Minette in full and eager talk on her lap. Netta was looking quite cheerful under the influence of Miss Gwynne's animated manners, and Minette's shouts of laughter. Toys and picture books were on the table before the child, and all sorts of garments spread about the room. Miss Gwynne had sent Gladys home for a large dressing-gown for Netta, and had expressed her intention of remaining some time.

Minette jumped off her lap when Rowland entered, and ran towards him, with a book in one hand, and a doll in the other.

"Look, uncle, what this kind lady has brought me; and she has made mamma quite well. She has been laughing like she used to laugh. Oh, uncle, I love her very much, don't you?"

Rowland did not say "yes," but went up to Miss Gwynne, and said with all his heart,

"Oh, Miss Gwynne, how can we ever thank you enough for all this kindness?"

"By not thanking me at all," replied Miss Gwynne, stooping to pick up a book, doubtless to conceal a very decided increase of colour.

These were the first genuine and natural words that Rowland had spoken to Miss Gwynne, since those fatal sentences under the great oak in her father's park.

"It is all like a dream," said Netta, passing her hand over her eyes and forehead, as she did constantly, as if to clear away some cloud that obscured her memory. "If mother were only here, it would be quite home-like."

Truly Gladys had made the room almost a pleasant place. The books and work she had brought with her, were already on the tables, and the flowers filled all the old-fashioned vases, taken from the mantel-piece. The fire was bright, and the hearth swept, and poor Netta and Minette were neat and clean.

"Uncle, what have you done with the geranium?" suddenly asked Minette.

"I left it at home, dear."

"How cross of you, uncle, to let the pretty flower die."

"I put it in water, Minette, because it came from Glanaravon, where your mother and I were born, and where your grandfather and grandmother lived."

"I don't like grandmamma, uncle, she was so fat, and talked so strangely."

"You should not say that; but you have another grandmother whom you have never seen."

"Shall we go to her, mammy dear? and will you come, Uncle Rowland? and shall the kind lady come, and Gladys? and then we can gather those pretty flowers. I saw them growing once at the Crystal Palace, and they would not let me pick them."

Netta forgot her grief, Rowland his sermon, Miss Gwynne her dignity, in talking to Minette of Glanaravon and its inhabitants; and, by degrees, they fell into a conversation upon old friends and old times, that ended in the days when they played together as children in the garden at the Vicarage, whilst the squire and

his lady were paying their periodical visits to the Vicar and his lady.

Unconsciously it oozed out how every incident of those childish games was remembered and treasured up by Rowland, as well as the meetings of a more advanced age, when as a Rugby boy, he tried to make himself agreeable to the young heiress, who bestowed no thought on him.

But Rowland suddenly remembered that he was treading on dangerous ground, and must not forget who he was, and who Miss Gwynne was. Those words always came to haunt him, whenever he felt more than usually happy ; and how could he feel happy for one moment, with Netta possibly dying, and Howel an exile for forgery. Poor fellow, it was only a passing gleam through the mists of a hard life ; let him enjoy it.

Gladys returned, and Rowland got a cab for Miss Gwynne, who went home to dinner. Rowland had some tea, and went to his evening service in the church.

After tea, Gladys read a story to Minette, which interested Netta, and so the day passed,

with but a slight recurrence of Netta's nervous excitement.

Gladys asked Netta if she would like her to read a chapter in the Bible, and Netta said yes; so, with Minette on her lap, she read one of the lessons of the day, which she knew to be particularly applicable to her.

"I will read the other with you," said Netta, when it was concluded, taking her mother's little Testament out of her pocket.

"I wish you would teach me to read, Gladys?" said Minette. "Justine taught me to read French, and to say French prayers, but I can't read English."

"Perhaps mamma will teach you, darling!" said Gladys, "and I will help when she is poorly."

"We will begin to-morrow," said Netta; "I meant to get her a governess, but we were always moving about, and so I never did."

They read the second lesson, and when it was finished, Netta asked Gladys to sing her a hymn. "The Evening Hymn, Gladys. I could sing and play that once, before I learnt to sing French songs."

Gladys' beautiful, clear voice, soon began the "Glory to Thee, my God this night," that has been the evening song of praise of so many thousands for so many years. Netta joined at intervals, and her wandering eyes seemed to be steadied, for the time, into a fixed attention, as she gazed at Gladys whilst she sung.

When she finished, Minette was crying. Gladys soothed her, and asked her what was the matter.

"It was so beautiful!" she said. "Your voice was like the lady's I heard at the play, only the words were so solemn. I thought of my papa. I do not love him much, because he was cross to mamma, but I want to see him, that you may sing to him and make him good."

Gladys saw Netta's countenance lose the expression of calm it had worn for a few moments, and regain the bewildered and painful one of the morning.

"We can pray for your papa, my love," she said, gently.

"Will you, will you, Gladys!" almost screamed Netta. "Your prayers will be heard, you are so

good. Now, before Minette goes to bed, that she, too, may pray for her father."

Gladys had long been in the habit of praying with, and or people in great misery, as well as in great sin, so the request did not startle her as it might have startled many. She read, from the Prayer Book, the Confession, and then chose the concluding portion of the Litany, feeling sure that almost any part of that list of petitions was suitable both for Howel and themselves. When she read the words, "That it may please Thee to have mercy upon all men," she paused, and added earnestly, "especially upon him for whom we now desire to pray," and little Minette added to this, "that is my poor papa."

It was with difficulty that Gladys could conclude, she was herself so affected by Netta's sobs, and Minette's innocent petition, but when they rose from their knees, Netta said, "I have not really prayed before, Gladys, for a long time. Will God ever forgive me?" and Minette entreated Gladys "to teach her her prayers in English; she liked them so much better than in French."

Gladys endeavoured to comfort the poor mother by passages from the Scripture, and promised the child "to teach her to pray," and so she helped to repay to their mother and grandmother, the debt of gratitude she owed to her and her family.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NIECE.

THE following day, Mrs. Jones came to see Netta, and to do her part in amusing her, and distracting her mind from Howel's promised return. Mr. Jones also accompanied Rowland in the afternoon in his visit to his sister, and, the ice once broken, these kind and Christian people came, alternately with Miss Gwynne, daily, for about a week, during which period there had been no news of Howel, either public or private. Mr. Wenlock visited Netta regularly, but said there could be no improvement in her health, and comparatively little strengthening of the mind, until she could be removed to country air; this, however, she would not

hear of, although she cried very much, and was painfully excited, when Rowland gave her a letter from her mother, entreating her to come to Glanaravon, and made her acquainted with the contents of a letter he had received from his father, which we will transcribe.

"Glanaravon Farm,
"October 9, 185—

"My dear Son,

"Your letter came duly to hand, and I will not deny that it affected me very much. Netta, set up above her station at Abertewey, after disobeying her parents by running away, is very different from Netta, deserted by her scamp of a husband, and left in a poor London lodging. Bring her home, and we will take care of her and her child, though I would rather lose a thousand pounds than have to see her as she is. Mother wants to go up and nurse her, but as that would kill her, I don't choose to let her go. If you can't bring her down, Owen shall fetch her. I always said how it would all end. Netta will believe me now it's no good; but no need

to tell her that. I wish Howel the— Well, I won't say more, but remain

"Your affectionate father,

"DAVID PROTHERO."

Miss Gwynne was very anxious to tell Netta that Howel was supposed to be in America, and that it was well-known he could not return; and at last Rowland took Mr. Wenlock into full confidence, and asked him whether it would be advisable to do so. He said that he feared she would be frightened at first, and then consider it a *ruse* to get her away. However something must be done. To tell her that her husband was a felon, would kill her; and she would die if she remained in that close air. He would think the matter over, and decide.

It was, however, decided for them the following morning. Netta was the first to hear, as usual, the postman's rap. Manœuvre as she would, Gladys could not prevent this, and it always brought on considerable excitement. This morning, however, there was actually a letter for Netta, and Sarah went up-stairs with it to Gladys. Although she called Gladys out

of the room to give it to her, Netta suspected something, ran into the passage, and seized the letter.

Gladys was obliged to support her back to the sofa, and give her some medicine, before she was sufficiently herself to open it. When she recovered, she waited for Gladys to leave the room, which she thought it best to do, and then broke the seal. The letter contained the following words:—

"Dearest,

"You had better go to your mother or mine. Kiss our child for me. Believe that I love you. God bless you."

When Gladys returned to the sitting-room, upon a cry from Minette, she found Netta in a swoon. The letter was tightly clasped in her hand, the envelope was on the floor. She ventured to look at the address and postmark. The former was to Mrs. Mills, the latter some illegible place in America. She wanted no more information, and asked for none. She brought poor Netta to herself with difficulty,

and let her put the letter in its envelope, and both in her bosom, without a question. Netta laid on the sofa, with her eyes closed, and said not a word. All that Gladys or Minette could do to attract her attention, was unavailing. But when Rowland came, she roused herself sufficiently to say, "I am ready to go home now, Rowland: I must go directly." And then she relapsed into a state of passive inaction. Rowland went for Mr. Wenlock, and was fortunate in finding him at home. He accompanied him to Netta, and said that she must be roused by a change of some kind. Rowland said that it was absolutely necessary to write to summon his brother to fetch Netta, and that by the time the letter reached home, and Owen reached London, three days must elapse. Fortunately, Miss Gwynne arrived, and with her usual promptitude, proposed that Netta should be taken for those three days to Mrs. Jones's; and she returned home at once to expedite any arrangements Mrs. Jones might have to make.

"I am afraid, my dear Serena," she said, when she had begun the subject, "that it will put you out. But the poor creature shall have

my bed-room, and I can sleep anywhere for those few nights. The dressing-room, Gladys' work-room, will do beautifully for her to sit in if she shouldn't be able to come into the drawing-room."

"Yes," said Mrs. Jones, "we can put a sofa in it and easy-chair, and make a regular snuggery of it."

Mr. Jones came in and entered into consultation.

"I shall be thankful if she can come here," he said, "for poor Prothero is making himself quite ill with anxiety and overwork. I don't think he has slept four hours a night since he found her. And then, Gladys! she is not strong, she will be laid up."

"I believe you love Gladys better than me," laughed Mrs. Jones.

"It was love at first sight, my dear. She was the first pretty girl that I saw after I came from Australia. And I have gone on loving her better and better ever since."

"The worst of it is, that it is mutual," said Miss Gwynne. "I wonder whether it is on your account or Owen Prothero's that she has

refused all the London swains who are dying for her."

Mrs. Jones and Freda were soon hard at work arranging rooms. Every available comfort was put into Freda's bed-room and dressing-room, and her own clothes and general possessions were turned out to find a home elsewhere. Gladys' little work-room soon wore a most cheerful aspect, and the easiest chair and sofa the house afforded were put into it. Whilst these matters were being arranged, Mr. Jones was dispatched to tell Rowland to bring his sister as soon as possible, and in the course of a few hours they arrived, accompanied by Gladys and Minette. The shock of the morning had so weakened Netta's nervous system, that Rowland was obliged to carry her up-stairs. When she was put on the sofa in the little room, and saw so many kind friends about her once more, the bewildered, wandering eyes found relief in tears.

"Gladys! you will not go away," she said, holding Gladys by the hand. "She may come home with me, Miss Gwynne?"

Gladys knelt down by the sofa, and tried to

soothe her, by telling her that her brother was coming to fetch her.

"I can't go home without Gladys!" persisted Netta, casting wild, beseeching glances from one to the other of the friends who stood round her.

"She shall go with you, Netta, decidedly," said Miss Gwynne. "It will be much the best plan."

"Gladys, you will come with us!" said Minette, throwing her arm round her neck, as she knelt by her mother. "You won't go away from poor mamma, and your little Minette."

Gladys felt, that in this, she was but an instrument. However, it was settled that she was to accompany Netta home; and if the inmates of the Farm did not receive her willingly, she was to go the Park, whither Miss Gwynne was to follow shortly, for her long promised Christmas visit.

When Netta and Rowland were left alone, Minette having been seduced by Miss Gwynne into another room, Netta said,

"You see, Rowland, I must go away directly,

because I don't know when he may come. I am sure he will fetch me, and if I stay here he will not know where to find me."

"Only two or three days, dear Netta. I have written to Owen. He will get the letter to-morrow, and be here the next day. You can start the day after to-morrow, if you will try to rouse yourself, and eat and drink."

"Yes, I will; but I am afraid of father. It is nearly ten years since I saw him, and if he is cross now, I shall die."

"He will be kind, quite kind."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, quite sure."

"And will you come and see me, Rowland? I used to think you cross too, but now you are very good to me. Do you think it was wrong of me to run away with Howel? You know he loves me; he says so, Rowland."

Here Netta pressed her hand upon the letter that was in her bosom, and Rowland kissed her tenderly.

At intervals, during that day and the next, Netta made fitful efforts to exert herself, but it was evident to all that her body was getting

weaker, and every one dreaded the journey in prospect, and longed for its conclusion.

Netta had taken a sudden and violent interest in teaching her child to read and repeat hymns. The hymns that it pleased Minette best to learn were some that Gladys had sung at her mother's request. These Netta did not know by heart, indeed her failing memory prevented her retaining anything she had once known; so an old hymn book was produced from Gladys' book shelf, which contained these hymns, that she had been taught in her childhood by her mother.

It was the second evening of Netta's stay with the Jones's, and she had been prevailed upon to go into the drawing-room, where Rowland was added to the usual little party.

She was gradually sinking into a state of apparent forgetfulness of those around her, from which it had been so difficult to rouse her since Howel's letter, when Miss Gwynne said,

"I think Minette knows the hymn now, Mr. Jones. Ask mamma if you may say it, dear."

"Mamma, may I try to say the hymn, now? Mr. Jones will take me to see the little children to-morrow if I know it," asked the child.

Netta was roused.

"Where is the book? I don't think I remember it," she said.

"I will go to Gladys for the book. I know the way, mamma."

Minette ran to the little room where Gladys was at work busily preparing for the journey. She got the hymn book, asked Gladys to find the place, and returning to the drawing-room triumphantly, gave the book to Mr. Jones.

"You must hear me, to see that I say it quite, quite right."

The hymn was somewhat difficult for a child, but it had taken Netta's fancy, because the words were written for an old Welsh air that she knew well; indeed the book consisted principally of English and Welsh hymns that had been composed for some of the fine old Welsh tunes.

The words were as follows:—

MORNING, Y FO RY.

Great God, look on me,
From thy throne eternal;
Make pure unto Thee
This my hymn diurnal.
I my grateful voice would blend,
With Nature's loud thanksgiving;
Praises through the earth would send
For the bliss of living.
Then, God, look on me,
From Thy throne Eternal,
Make pure unto Thee,
This my hymn diurnal.
On the wings of morning,
With songs of birds up-soaring,
I address Thee,
Praise and bless Thee,
Joying and adoring.
Oh, Lord! bless this day,
All my thoughts and doings,
And keep my heart away
From all vain pursuings.
Shield me with Thy fostering wings,
From every wild temptation,
Let the daily course of things,
Work for my salvation.
Oh, Lord! bless this day,
All my thoughts and doings,
And keep my heart away
From all vain pursuings.
With the hymns of flowers,

And streams and fountains blending;
I adore Thee,
And implore Thee,
Prayer and praise upsending.

Minette was in a state of great excitement whilst saying her hymn, and repeated it so energetically, and withal so feelingly that the attention of Mrs. Jones, Miss Gwynne and Rowland was quite drawn towards her. They did not, therefore, notice the still greater excitement of Mr. Jones, as he was, professedly, looking at the hymn book to see whether the child repeated her task correctly.

"Well done, my little niece," cried Rowland, catching the child up in his arms, and giving her a hearty kiss.

"Let me go, uncle. Mr. Jones, Mr. Jones," screamed Minette, "may I go with you to see the poor children, Mr. Jones?"

Mr. Jones did not even hear the entreating appeal of the little girl. He was out of the drawing-room, book in hand, and in Gladys' work-room, almost before the struggling Minette was released from her uncle's arms, and forcibly caught by Miss Gwynne.

Gladys was sitting quietly at her work, humming low the air of the hymn Minette had been saying, when Mr. Jones entered the room abruptly.

"Gladys, tell me where you got this book," he said putting the hymn book on the table before her.

He looked so nervous and excited that Gladys was almost frightened.

"My mother gave it me, Sir," was the reply.

"And who wrote these names?" he asked, pointing to the words written on the fly leaf, which were "Margaret Jones, from her affectionate brother, William Jones."

"My uncle, Sir, I believe, who gave the book to my mother."

"And your mother—your mother, who was she?"

"The daughter of a clergyman, Sir."

"I know that. But where—what—who?"

"That is what I don't know, Sir."

"Who did she marry? For God's sake tell me all, Gladys."

"She ran away with my father, Sir, an Irish

soldier, a corporal named O'Grady. She went abroad with him, and did not come back to Ireland for two years."

"And then—and her father—and—and her brother?"

"Her father was dead, Sir, and nobody knew where her brother was."

"Where did her father live?"

"Alas! Sir, I cannot tell that either. We never talked to my poor mother about him, because it made her so unhappy, and as he was dead, I had no interest in asking for the address. All I know was, that she was Welsh; and when she was dying, she told me to go into Wales and find my uncle. I don't think she quite knew what she was saying, but I came."

The tears gathered in Gladys' eyes, and hearing a strange heavy sigh from Mr. Jones, she looked up at him through their mist, and saw that he was struggling to speak through some great emotion.

"Oh, Sir! what is the matter?" said Gladys rising and going towards him as he stood, trembling, on the other side of her work-table.

He could not speak, but opening his arms as

she approached him, folded her in them, and kissed her, as she had not been kissed before, since her poor mother died.

Gladys could only yield to the embrace, she knew not wherefore. She loved Mr. Jones as if he were her own father, he had been almost like a father to her ever since she had been in his house; she felt as if she were once more in a father's arms.

We will leave them thus for one moment, to return to the drawing-room.

Mrs. Jones, in her turn, kissed Minette, and praised her for repeating her hymn so well.

"But where is Mr. Jones?" asked the child. "Will he take me to see the little boys and girls?"

"I think he must be gone to find a book for you, dear," was the reply.

But, as neither Mr. Jones nor the book came, Mrs. Jones got rather fidgetty, and fancying her husband might be ill, left the room to see what had become of him. She went to the dining-room, study, and bed-room, and, not finding him, went to ask Gladys whether she

knew where he was. She was not a little astonished at finding him with Gladys in his arms, and the door half open at his back.

Mrs. Jones was not a jealous wife, but Gladys was a very pretty girl, Mr. Jones was avowedly very fond of her, and Mr. Jones was mortal.

She felt a strange pain at her heart, turned pale, and stood for a moment unobserved by either, on the threshold, irresolute, when she heard these words from her husband,

"It must be so. Gladys—you are—you must be—my poor, dear, lost sister's child!"

Gladys and Mrs. Jones uttered a simultaneous cry, and the latter entered the room.

"My dear William, what does this mean?" she said, approaching her husband and putting her hand on his shoulder.

"Serena!" (he, too, called that gentle woman Serena) "my love. For my sake! This is my sister's child—my niece—my—our Gladys!"

Mr. Jones released the bewildered Gladys from his embrace, and almost placed her in the arms of his wife, who, scarcely comprehending what was passing, kissed her tenderly.

Then Gladys sat down, covered her face with

her hands, and sobbed convulsively. It was all a dream to her, from which she must awake. It could not be true. Mr. and Mrs. Jones soothed her. The former, restraining his own emotion, endeavoured to calm hers, by telling her that it was he who had written the names in that fortunate hymn-book; he who was the brother of her mother; he who was her uncle, and who would be, not only an uncle, but a father to her henceforth.

At last, the agitated girl looked up at the kind and loving faces that were bending over her, and murmured,

"It cannot be—it is—too good—too great —too happy."

"It is true, Gladys, my niece, my child," said Mrs. Jones, stooping to kiss her forehead.

Mrs. Jones sat down by her, and taking one of her hands in hers, said,

"It all seems a dream, Gladys. But if it be true, remember, you are now my niece, my child as well; and, God knows, I love you and value you dearly."

Once more the lonely Gladys felt that she had kindred. Yielding to the feeling, she threw

her arms round Mrs. Jones' neck, and gave vent to the emotion she had been striving to suppress.

At this juncture, Miss Gwynne appeared, who, wondering in her turn what could detain Mr. and Mrs. Jones so long from their guests, came to look for them.

Of course, she wondered still more when she found them both with their arms round one another and Gladys.

She was going away; but Mrs. Jones, perceiving her, said,

"Come in, dear Freda, Minette's hymn has led to a wonderful discovery—has given us a niece—a child—in—in—our dear friend Gladys."

Miss Gwynne knelt down at the feet of the sobbing Gladys, and taking one of her hands, said,

"Gladys, if this be true, we cannot love you better than we do now, or esteem you more; but you now *feel* one of us, instead of the isolated Gladys of this little room, which you have resolutely been hitherto."

As may be imagined, Gladys was a long

time realizing the fact, that she was suddenly, and in the most extraordinary manner, raised from the Irish beggar, lady's maid, or whatever she had hitherto chosen to consider herself—for every one about her had long looked upon her as a friend—to the niece of the good and kind Mr. Jones. When she was able to speak, her first words were,

"I do not understand it—I cannot believe it. It is too good—too happy."

"I can scarcely believe it, either," said Mr. Jones, taking up the hymn-book, and turning to his wife and Miss Gwynne, who had, thus far, taken the strange news upon Mr. Jones' word, which they never ventured to dispute.

"This is my writing. Margaret Jones was my sister, and Gladys' mother. I gave her this book when we were both young, and the date, also in my hand-writing, marks the time, some two or three years after the gift, when I was at college, and she must have been about eighteen; she ran away with an Irish soldier, whose real name, even, we never learnt. My poor father doated on my sister, and spoilt her. She was high-spirited and wilful, but very

loving, and very handsome. Not at all like Gladys. My sister's was the Welsh, Gladys' is the Irish cast of countenance; yet I have seen an expression in Gladys' face that has reminded me of her mother.

"We discovered, after my sister ran away, that she had met the man she married when going to visit the landlady of a small inn, in my father's parish, who was ill. It seems that this woman connived at their meeting; and when strictly questioned, said, that she had believed he was a gentleman, and that he had called himself Captain O'Brien."

"My poor father!" here broke in Gladys "He bitterly repented this, his only deception. He was of a good family, and his mother was an O'Brien; but no one belonging to him could afford to purchase him a commission, and so he went into the ranks. He once told me, that he persuaded my mother to marry him first, and then promised to let her write to his father. But I only know scraps of the story. I fancy my father was on his way home on leave, when he saw my mother and fell in love with her. He loved her very dearly, and as long as he lived

she wanted nothing that he could get her. The regiment was suddenly ordered abroad, and my mother could not write to her father, or did not, before they sailed. And so she delayed, and delayed; but she wrote at last, and received no answer at all. I fancy she wrote several times from foreign parts, but never heard from any one. I know she wrote again from Ireland; but the letter was returned, with a note from some one, saying that her father had been dead some years, and no one knew anything of her brother."

"Too true! too true!" said Mr. Jones. "My poor father, never very strong, was in his grave in less than six months after my sister left him. I returned from College to nurse, and bury him. I have told you all this, my dear Serena, little thinking that the young girl I first saw, after visiting his grave some twenty years after I had seen him laid in it, should be the child of the beloved daughter who had helped to hasten him thither."

"My poor, dear mother!" said Gladys, sobbing as if her heart would break.

"Still less that you, my dear niece, would

be five or six years in my house; I loving you as a daughter, and yet not knowing the relationship existing between us. But how could it have been discovered but for this book? I only knew of you, that you were an Irish girl escaping from poverty in Ireland, to find some Welsh friends, whose address even you did not know. But for your evident truthfulness, the very story must have been doubted. When I saw you at Mr. Prothero's, I took you for his daughter; since I have looked upon you as one of our family, an orphan to be pitied and loved. Let us thank God and kind Christian people, that you have been so pitied and loved."

Mr. Jones's mild grey eyes, full of tears, turned upon Miss Gwynne, who said, hastily,

"Ought not we to tell her first and best friends of this strange discovery?—Rowland, Mr. Prothero, and Netta. What must they think of our long absence?"

"Not for worlds, Miss Gwynne, if you please!" cried Gladys, "I could never be what I would be to Mrs. Jenkins and her dear mother, if I were anything but the Gladys they have always known. They would be treating

me as—as—they would not let me work and wait upon Mrs. Jenkins. Until she is at home, at least, let me be as I am, as I was; it is all so strange. Until I have offered to remain and nurse her, and been refused—until, in short—"

"I understand, Gladys," said Miss Gwynne. "You are quite right. Let them all value you for yourself, and then we will introduce you as—"

"I didn't mean that, indeed, indeed, Miss Gwynne," said Gladys, her pale face growing red. "I only wanted to show my gratitude, as I am, to them all. Perhaps even Mr. Prothero may excuse me then, and—"

Here Gladys broke down again. She could not explain her own bewildered thoughts; but her friends understood her, and respected the honest pride that would be known, welcomed and beloved for merit, and not for a bettered position and condition. Miss Gwynne saw a vision of Owen in the back ground, with his handsome, honest, black eyes, and white teeth; but she did not mention what she saw.

"At any rate, I must go and make the best of lame excuses," she said, "and leave you in your new relationship, to dry your eyes, and

learn to say 'Uncle.' Such a pleasant name! I always longed for an uncle."

Miss Gwynne returned to the drawing-room, and told Rowland that Mr. Jones had been quite upset by the Welsh hymn that Minette had repeated, having known it under peculiar circumstances, when he was young. She apologised for his non-appearance, and Rowland, seeing that something unusual had occurred, took his departure. She promised Minette a visit to the school, and prevailed on the little girl to allow one of the servants to put her to bed, instead of Gladys. Minette begged Miss Gwynne to let her say her "English prayers" to her first, which she, of course, did.

Then Freda did her best to amuse Netta until Mrs. Jones appeared, and said Gladys was quite ready to assist Netta, if she liked to retire for the night.

When Netta was in bed, Gladys joined her friends, and they discussed, more calmly than before, their newly-found relationship.

Gladys brought with her her Bible, in which her mother had written her name, and Mr. Jones recognised his sister's hand-writing. She

had also a lock of her mother's hair, and her wedding-ring, and one or two other trifles, that drew fresh tears from a brother's eyes.

Gladys said that she should like, for her own satisfaction, that a certificate of her mother's marriage, and of her birth, should be obtained. Her mother was married, she believed, during the short time she was in Ireland; and she was born, she knew, in the parish where her father's parents lived, to whose care her father had confided her mother. Two children had been born, and died before her birth, during the period that her parents were abroad.

It may be as well to say here, that the certificates were duly procured, through the clergyman of the parish, to whom Mr. Jones wrote a statement of the case. Also that letters, written for the gratification of Gladys, to the Protestant and Roman Catholic clergy of her parent's last neighbourhood were duly answered, and confirmed all that Gladys had said of them and of herself from first to last. This, of course, took some time to effect; but I have so far anticipated the event, to avoid recurring to it again.

Gladys now recapitulated, more minutely, the

circumstances of her early history, a sketch of which she gave Miss Gwynne and Mrs. Prothero when she was recovering from her fever.

There were a few points that she did not mention at that time, which we will insert for the benefit of the reader, in Gladys' own words.

"My father left my mother in Ireland, and went with his regiment to India. My mother lived with my grandfather, who was old and infirm, but still managed a small farm, in which my mother assisted. He died, and then my mother kept a school, took in needlework, and did what she could to help out my father's remittances, which were small, but regular. He was severely wounded in the head, and got his discharge upon his corporal's pay. Being a clever man, he soon procured work, as a kind of under-agent, and we lived very happily together for some years. He was never a saving man, so what he earned he spent, and my poor mother spent it with him. I had two brothers and three sisters, and when my father died, rather suddenly, we had nothing but our own exertions to depend upon. My mother and I managed to live and keep the children—how, I scarcely

know—till the famine from the failure of the potato crop, and consequent fever and starvation came upon us. God preserve me, and every one else, from witnessing such misery again! One child died after another, and then the darling mother! I had nothing to give her; literally nothing. Every one round us was in the same state. On her death-bed she was rambling and incoherent, but talked of Wales, and her father and brother.

"'Go to them, Gladys,' she said, 'when I am gone. Maybe they'll take to ye.' 'Where, mother dear!' I asked. But she did not hear me. Thank God! she clasped her hands and prayed for pardon of her sins through Jesus Christ; and so she died. I don't know how I lived after her—how I buried her—how I came into Wales. I scarcely remember any thing, till I awoke from that illness in calm, clean, beautiful Glanaravon; with my mistress's blessed face looking down upon me, and Miss Gwynne waiting on me, and Mr. Rowland praying for me."

For some years past Gladys had succeeded in obtaining a calm and even spirit, by striving

to banish these dreadful scenes from her mind, by active labours for others, and abnegation of self. Now, they opened once more the flood-gates of memory, and as the old recollections rushed through, like repressed waters, her strength of mind gave way, and she could do nothing but weep.

"Only to-night—forgive me!" she sobbed. "I shall be better to-morrow. But it all comes back, all; even in the moment of my great happiness"

Her kind friends soothed and comforted her—her uncle wept with her, and by degrees she once more grew calm.

Before they separated for the night, Mr. Jones offered up a thanksgiving for the great mercy God had vouchsafed to them; and commending his newly-found niece to the further protection of that gracious Providence, who had led the orphan to her home, in His presence, and that of his wife and her friends, solemnly blessed her, and adopted her as his own child.

It need scarcely be added that his wife registered and signed the vow that her husband made.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HAPPIEST MAN IN THE WORLD.

Most people know what it is to awake from sleep the morning after a great sorrow; some, also, know what it is to awake after a great and unexpected joy. Gladys opened her eyes upon a dark, thick, cheerless November fog in London; one of the most depressing of all the atmospheric influences. But she did not think of the fog. Although she did not, at first, fully realize the happiness that she had experienced, and was to experience, she felt, on awaking, a strange sensation of spirits so light, and a heart beating to such cheerful measure, that it all seemed too ethereal to be real. She thought it was the continuation of a blissful

dream. For many a long year she had retired to rest, and arisen in the morning calm, resigned—nay, cheerful; but it was the calmness and resignation of a soul attuned by prayer and self-restraint, to an equanimity that rarely was disturbed by mirth or pleasure. Now, that soul seemed to dance within her to exhilirating melodies. So happy had been her dreams—so joyous her sleep—that her eyes sparkled unwonted fires when she opened them; and as she jumped out of bed, there was an elasticity in her movements that surprised her very self.

Netta and Minette were still sleeping, and as she dressed herself carefully and neatly, she almost forgot that every one else was not as suddenly raised from sorrow to joy as herself.

"He will come to-day," she thought, as she smoothed her dark hair, "and I shall meet him as an equal; no longer a suspicion of my truth. He will not know it yet, but I know it, and oh! the difference of feeling that you can clear yourself by a word when you like. Not to him, for he never doubted—generous, kind Mr. Owen! but to his father! to all. How can I be thankful enough! and such an

uncle and aunt! It must be a dream; but will he care for me still? so long! and after all my coldness. He has asked me again and again, and each time have I refused him; but then I was an Irish beggar, and nothing more, and I would have died rather than have brought disgrace into his family. And still my promise to his father is binding, and without his consent I never could—but where am I wandering? Maybe he'll not care for me now I am all this older—and he so handsome that he may have any one in and about Glanaravon."

Gladys cast a shy look into her glass, and a delicate blush kindled her cheek, as those dark violet eyes glanced from beneath their dark black fringes. Gladys! you are but a weak woman after all.

When Gladys was dressed, she gently awoke Minette, and took her into the dressing-room to attire her also.

"Gladys dear, how pretty you look!" exclaimed the child, "you have a pink cheek, and your eyes are as bright as the sky; and you have such a pretty gown and collar, and everything. You are quite a lady, now you have

left off that gown mamma gave you so long ago. Is Uncle Owen, who is coming to-day, as nice as Uncle Rowland? do you love him as well, Gladys?"

"He is very, very nice, dear, and as kind as any gentleman in the world."

The little girl clapped her hands.

"I shall like to go to Glanaravon and make mamma quite well."

Soon after breakfast, Rowland arrived, accompanied by Owen, who had travelled all night.

Gladys was with Netta in her bed-room, but all the rest of the family welcomed Owen. Mr. Jones shook him by the hand with peculiar warmth, because he was given to understand that he loved his newly-found niece.

Minette was soon on his knee, and in less than ten minutes had duly informed him that she loved him next to Uncle Rowland, and that "Gladys told her he was the nicest gentleman in the world."

Owen laughed heartily at this, to conceal his rising colour, and said,

"And how is Gladys?"

"Quite well, she is coming to Glanaravon with us, to take care of mamma and me."

Here Mrs. Jones interposed, and explained how matters stood.

In a few moments, Gladys appeared to say that Netta was ready, in her little sitting-room, to see her brothers.

Owen was not shy, so he walked bravely across the room to meet Gladys, and to shake hands with her, so thoroughly *con amore*, that if, as Minette expressed it, her cheek was pink when she entered the room, it was crimson when she quitted it.

Mr. and Mrs. Jones looked at one another with great satisfaction, and somehow or other, Rowland's eyes met Miss Gwynne's, and both smiled involuntarily.

"He is a fine young fellow," said Mrs. Jones, when Owen and Rowland had gone up-stairs to Netta, accompanied by Minette.

"I almost wonder how two such sons with such a fine sturdy, sensible father, should have had such a silly little sister as that poor child up-stairs; but I must go out. Ask them to dinner, my dear, and don't let Gladys tire her-

self to death before she starts for her journey. Did you ever see any one look prettier in your life than she did when she met that fine young man. What a couple they will make!"

"What a romance you have worked up already, my dear," said Mrs. Jones, laughing, "but certainly one may be proud of Gladys. How thoroughly lady-like she is, and looks. And she is so happy; she told me just now that she felt as if she had suddenly begun a new life."

"God grant it may be a happy one, and may He bless you, my dear, for taking to the poor child so kindly."

Miss Gwynne, who had left the party to put on her bonnet, here appeared, and Mr. Jones and she set out on parochial business.

When Rowland and Owen had been some time with Netta, they returned to Mrs. Jones, who pressed them to come and dine. They declined, however, having much to talk of, that could not be discussed in public, even before the kindest of friends. Moreover, when Owen had been in London before, he told his brother that he would not dine in any house as guest,

where Gladys was considered as a servant. In vain his brother assured him that she was more friend than servant—she did not dine with her friends, and therefore he would not dine with them.

When they had left the house, and reached Rowland's lodging, Owen said, his usually joyful face, clouded by an expression of sorrow and pain,

"Curse that fellow! I say, Rowland, I can't help it, it breaks my heart to see Netta as she is; and she will kill mother. As to father, there is no getting a civil word from him ever since the news came."

"I suppose every one knows it?" said Rowland.

"Of course, Aunt 'Lizbeth has employed Mr. Rice Rice, and a counsel, for that scoundrel, to do what they can when the case is tried. You know they have indicted him, and present or absent, it is to come on at the next assizes. Then, if they prove him guilty, or make out a case against him, or whatever they call it, he will be brought to trial as soon as they can catch him."

"Sir Samuel Spendall, and Sir Horatio Simpson, are furious against him, I hear." said Rowland.

"No wonder; I foresaw something bad when I was at Abertewey. But what of that rascal, Deep?"

"They can make nothing of him; he is already released, and if he knows anything of Howel, he has not let it out."

"I can't help liking poor Aunt 'Lizbeth; she says she will spend every farthing she has for Howel; and when I tell her to remember her old age, and keep her money, all I get is, 'What will I do if my Howel is ruined! what will I care for money if he is gone?' It is pretty well known that he has forged her name for thousands of pounds, but she wont own it, and swears to all his signatures as her own, I verily believe with her eyes shut."

"Does father hear all these things?"

"Nobody dares to speak to him; he opens out to me with a vengeance, and wants a little of your preaching to refine his language; but who can wonder? I am ashamed to shew my nose myself. The first bit of pleasure I have

had since it began, was seeing Gladys look so well and happy this morning. What has happened to her? is she going to be married? for nothing else could have changed a girl's face from November to June. At the same time, she might have a little more feeling for us, than to look her best when we are at our worst. Poor Netta! I'm sure she won't live. I've wished myself at sea nearly every day for the last six years, and I'm sure I wish myself there now."

"My good fellow," said Rowland, "don't say that; what should any of us do without you? You are the only stay of our parents at home, and will be poor Netta's last comfort."

"If I were sure I were of any use, I wouldn't mind; but when I see Gladys, or think of her, the truth is, I get savage. Perhaps it is a proper punishment for pretending to stay at home on father's and mother's account, when it was really on hers. But never mind, I suppose one girl's really as good as another. Will you come down at Christmas, Rowland?"

"I wish I could; but our Rector is so ill, that there is no chance of his being able to leave

Nice this winter, and Jones and I have all the duty. The last account was so bad, that Mr. Wenlock fears, if he returns at all, it will be only to die."

We will not follow the brothers further in their conversation; they made the most of the few hours they were together, and after a short night's rest, arose early, breakfasted, and went to fetch Netta.

The sight of her favourite brother, and the prospect of returning home had roused her, and she seemed more herself than she had been since Howel's letter. Gladys was as bright and busy as a queen-bee, and Minette was all tears and smiles.

There were a great many "last words" to be said, and, as all the preparations had been made the previous day, there was plenty of time to say them.

"I don't know how to thank you," said poor Netta to Mrs. Jones and Miss Gwynne, as they were putting on her last warm cloak. The tears were streaming down her pale cheeks, and her hand, as usual, was on her heart.

Mrs. Jones kissed her, and Miss Gwynne

said cheerfully, "I shall see you soon, Netta, and I want Mrs. Jones to come to Glanaravon with me, so it will not be a long parting."

"You have been very good to my child and me—God will bless you!" sobbed Netta.

"I will come again, Mr. Jones, and see you, and Mrs. Jones, and the little children," said Minette, who was hugging Mr. Jones' legs most warmly.

He took her up in his arms, kissed her, and put her into the cab next her mother, who had been placed therein by Rowland.

Gladys' farewells were the last.

"That's what I call something like it, Rowly," said Owen, tapping his brother's shoulder, as he watched Mr. and Mrs. Jones, alternately, give Gladys a most affectionate embrace.

"But why does the old parson hug her so, he shouldn't do that if I were Mrs. Jones, or if she were Mrs. ——."

The truth was, that at the last the uncle's feelings overcame Gladys's desire for secrecy, and exploded in a kiss long and fatherly.

When she was in the cab, Mr. Jones called Owen aside, and said in a whisper.

"I know you will take care of Gladys, and remember, that although she is ready for everything that is good, she is not strong. If your father makes the least objection to her remaining with your sister, take her to the Park, whence she can return at once to us. As long as I live, no one will neglect her with impunity; but I am sure I can trust you and yours."

"That you certainly may," said Owen, nearly shaking Mr. Jones' hand off, but saying to himself a few minutes after, "what could he mean by putting her into my care. If his wife had done it, or Miss Gwynne, well and good; but I declare, parsons are no better than the rest of us. I dare say Rowly isn't half as steady as he seems; he and Miss Gwynne are wonderfully polite to one another, and he's as grand as any lord."

Owen jumped upon the box, and Rowland by the side of Gladys inside the cab, and so they drove off through the thick fog, some five or six miles to the Paddington station.

Owen took a second class ticket for himself, but when Netta heard that he had done so, she begged so hard either to be allowed to travel

second class with him, or that he would come with her, that he was obliged to change it, and become, as he expressed it, "a grand gentleman for once in his life."

They had half a carriage to themselves, into which Rowland went, to be with Netta until the whistle sounded.

"Oh, brother!" sobbed Netta, "if I never see you again, promise to be kind to Howel; promise to give him whatever I leave for him. Perhaps I shall die—I don't know. Tell him all you have said to me; try to make him good, and give him the hope you have given me. Will you, brother? Say, will you?"

"I will do everything you wish, my darling sister, if I have the opportunity."

"And will you write to me about what you have been saying to me?"

"I will, dear, regularly. But you have only to believe and pray. God bless you, Netta, dear! God for ever bless you!"

The guard was at the door, Owen in the carriage. Rowland gave Netta one long, last kiss, and went out upon the platform.

"Kiss me, uncle," said Minette, putting her little face out of the window.

When she drew it in again, she wiped off a tear that Rowland had left upon her cheek.

"Good bye, Gladys—good bye, Owen," he said, stretching out his hand, which was clasping that of his brother as the train began to move, and separated him from the sister, brother, niece, and friend, whom he loved so well.

Poor Netta cried long and quietly in the corner of the carriage in which she had been placed. Of course, she had the side without an arm, that she might put up her feet when she liked. Owen and Gladys were placed, of necessity, side by side, and Minette jumped upon Gladys' lap, and began talking of Glanaravon. Owen and Gladys were quite shy with one another. The former studied Bradshaw, the latter occupied herself with Minette.

When Netta ceased crying, Owen tried to engage her attention, and amused her for a time by accounts of home, and country news. But by degrees, she relapsed into her usual abstraction.

Owen hated railway travelling, and was a

great fidget. Out at every station, of course, and alternately reading the newspaper, and making remarks upon the confounded November weather, when in the carriage. He scarcely addressed Gladys particularly, but talked to Netta or Minette; and Gladys thought him very cold and constrained, but did not know that he was thinking of what Colonel Vaughan had done years ago, and comparing it with Mr. Jones' embrace.

"Do you know, Netta, that I am thinking of getting married?" he said, suddenly, and thoroughly rousing Gladys.

"Don't be so foolish, Owen! You have been getting married, or falling in love, ever since you were twelve," said Netta. "Who is it now?"

"Miss Richards—Dr. Richards, daughter. It is the talk of the county. You know she has plenty of money."

Owen cast a side glance towards Gladys and saw her turn quite pale, which was very satisfactory to him.

"Is Miss Richards pretty, uncle?" asked Minette. "Is she as pretty as Gladys?"

"That depends upon taste."

"But what do you think, uncle? She must be very pretty, if she is as pretty as my dear Gladys! Isn't Gladys pretty, uncle?"

"Gladys knows what I think on that subject," said Owen, "but she doesn't care what I think."

This was said so that Netta, sitting opposite, did not hear.

"Oh, Mr. Owen!" said Gladys, involuntarily.

"Oh, Mrs. Snow!" said Owen.

As the day drew on, Netta got very weary, and, finally, slept. Minette, also, in spite of Gladys' resolute efforts to keep her awake, fell fast asleep, curled up in the corner, with her mother's feet in her lap. And so Owen and Gladys were *tête-à-tête*.

The November day was drawing to a close, and it was dull and dark. Gladys fancied Owen was asleep, and was thinking how very much more cheerful she felt in the morning than she did at that moment; and all because Owen said he was going to be married. She was trying to remember the great blessings she

had lately experienced, and that she ought to be thinking of Netta instead of her brother.

At last, Owen started up, and said,

"Gladys, do you like coming back to Glanaravon?"

"Dearly, Sir, if you like to have me."

"Now, Gladys, that is too absurd! You know I have wanted to have you all these years."

"I didn't mean that, Mr. Owen."

"Gladys, tell me why that old Jones kissed you."

"I—I—don't know. Because—because he is fond of me, Mr. Owen."

"That is no reason, Miss Gladys. If it was, somebody else would kiss you, too. Now I have an opportunity, I must ask you a few more questions. I beg you to understand that old Jones, who is so fond of you, put you under my especial care."

"Oh, Mr. Owen!"

"Oh, Mrs. Snow! Now, tell me why you let that cunning man of the world, Colonel Vaughan, give you ten shillings. This has been on my mind for six or seven years, and I

have never had an opportunity of getting it off before. You know if you won't have me for a lover, you may for a brother."

"Colonel Vaughan offered me the money, Mr. Owen, and I returned it to him. Who could have told you of that?"

"The boy who saw him give you some money, and picked up the half sovereign you dropped."

"He gave me money for poor Mr. Lloyd, who was ill, and offered me the half sovereign for myself, which I refused."

"Why did you refuse it?"

"Because I did not want it, and because he had no right to offer it me."

"Bravo, Gladys! You are a capital girl!"

"And yet, Mr. Owen, you think all sorts of unkind things of me when I am absent. For six years!"

"How can I help it, Gladys. You know that I love you better than my life, and yet you won't care one straw for me."

"Oh! Mr. Owen.

"I can tell you it is no trifling mark of constancy, for a wandering fellow like me to stick

to farming, and doing the dutiful son all these years. I should have been off to sea again long ago but for you, and—"

"And the father and mother, Mr. Owen."

"Well yes, to a certain extent. But you always answer every question but one like a pure, straight-forward young woman as you are. Why won't you tell me the reason you have for hating me so."

"I don't hate you, Mr. Owen."

"It must be either love or hate. You don't love me. Do you love any one else?"

"No."

"Have you a heart to give?"

"Ye—no."

"Which do you mean?"

"I cannot tell you, indeed I cannot!"

"Oh! Gladys, if you knew the pain? Why will you not make me happy, or at least give me a sensible reason?"

"I—I—promised—Oh! Mr. Owen."

"Dear Gladys, what? I will never betray you, and will always be a friend, a brother. Who have you promised? Not to marry, not to love—"

"Your father, Mr. Owen. I—I—promised never—to—without his consent."

Fortunately it was dusk, and the curtain between the double carriage was drawn, and Netta and Minette were, apparently at least, fast asleep, so no one saw Owen jump up from his seat with a kind of bound, seize Gladys' hand, try to look into her face, and finally sit down again, retaining possession of the said hand across the elbow of the carriage.

"Do you mean, Gladys, that you promised never to marry me without my father's consent?"

"Yes."

"Never to love me without his consent?"

"No."

"That you don't hate me?"

"No."

"That if I got his consent you would make me the happiest man in the world?"

"I would try, Mr. Owen."

"Nothing but his consent?"

"Nothing, Mr. Owen. If you do not change, I cannot."

"Gladys, do not trifle with me. But you

could not trifle. Have you cared for me? may I say loved me—all these years?"

"All these years."

Gladys bowed her head as if in shame over those clasped hands, and a large tear fell upon Owen's. He wanted no other confirmation of her words, and felt, as he had expressed it, the happiest man in the world.

CHAPTER X.

THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER.

It was nine o'clock when the fly that took the travellers from Swansea to Glanaravon reached the door of the Farm. The night was "dark and dreary;" very different was the hour, the weather, the aspect of external nature; very different were Netta's feelings and all the circumstances, when she left her home ten years ago. She had been thinking much of all these things during that gloomy drive, when her companions thought she was asleep.

Bright lights are in the windows and passage as the travellers look out of the carriage. Mrs. Prothero's anxious face is visible in front, Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan's tall forms above her from behind, the servants are without, Lion is barking joyously, but there is no Mr. Prothero.

"Is this Glanaravon, mamma?" asks Minette waking up and rubbing her eyes.

No answer.

Owen jumps out, and without stopping to greet his pale, trembling mother, turns to help Netta, who cannot help herself. He carries a dead weight into the parlour, and lays it on the sofa. Netta has fainted.

Gladys is at her side in a moment with every kind of restorative, but no one notices or thinks of her. Mrs. Prothero is on her knees rubbing her child's cold hands, and looking as white as the corpse-like child who is thus restored to her. Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan look at one another, and then at Netta, with a glance of pity and grief.

There is another face for one moment bent over the sofa, and the next a loud heavy groan is heard in the corner of the room that comes from a heart in extreme agony; but no one, save Minette, seems conscious of it. She turns affrighted at the sound, and in the impulse of her quick, warm nature runs to comfort.

"Mamma will be better soon," she says,

"she is often so. Don't cry so loud, you will frighten her."

Poor Mr. Prothero removes his hand from his eyes to behold, for the first time, his grandchild. Another heavy groan, almost a cry, and he takes the child in his large arms, and presses her to his breast, weeping like an infant.

Netta uncloses her eyes on familiar objects for a moment, and shuts them again. Has she seen the cheerful, old-fashioned parlour, the bright fire, near which the sofa is wheeled, her father's portrait over the mantel-piece, her mother at her feet?

"She is getting better," whispers Gladys, who still holds her place at Netta's head, with strong salts in her hand, and a bottle and glass by her side.

Again the eyes unclose, wander restlessly from one anxious face to another, settling on none; close again, once more unclose, and look with some consciousness on the breathless group that surrounds the sofa

"Father! father!" now murmurs Netta, "where is father?"

The feeble cry has reached that father's ears and inmost heart. He puts down Minette and staggers, blinded by his grief, to the sofa. All withdraw but his wife. He is on his knees before his poor penitent daughter. Her arms are round his neck, and she strives to rise but cannot. Oh! the depth, agony, remorse, of that long, silent, paternal and filial embrace.

"Do you forgive me, father?" asks Netta.

"All—all. God forgive us both!" groans Mr. Prothero.

Mrs. Prothero lays her head on her hands on the sofa, by which she kneels, and gives way to a passionate burst of grief.

"My poor, poor mistress," says Gladys, unable any longer to refrain from approaching her. "All is well, she will be better now."

"Mother!" cries Netta. "Don't cry so for me. Come and kiss me, mother."

Father and mother surround with their arms that wandering, restored lamb, and take it into the fold again.

A little voice from behind is heard.

"Mamma! mamma! think of your poor Minette!"

And in another minute, Minette is on the sofa, in the midst of her mother, grandfather, and grandmother.

Blessed are the warm, gushing tears that fall on the child's head—tears of love and reconciliation.

Soon the worthy Vicar and his wife, who have thus far been only spectators of the scene, draw near to bless and welcome their niece.

"She will faint again," whispers Gladys to Owen.

"She is happy now," replies Owen, looking into Gladys' tearful eyes from his own, equally dimmed with tears. It is the first time he has seen that face since he has known that Gladys loves him.

But Gladys is right—happiness is too overpowering for Netta. She faints in the midst of all those dear ones, so kind and loving.

Again Gladys is at her side to revive her, which she is able to do more quickly than before. When she is better, Gladys raises her pillows, and places her in a more comfortable posture. By degrees, every one is conscious that Gladys is present.

"Dear Gladys!" says Netta, "I am better now; quite—quite well, father!"

"Drink this first," says Gladys, giving her some wine and water that Owen has brought.

She drinks the wine and water, and again calls her father.

"I brought Gladys, father, I cannot do without her. She has saved my life, I think, and mother's, so Owen told me—didn't you Owen? May she stay with me, father?"

Netta presses her hand to her head, and looks at her father with those bewildered eyes which are only too sadly irresistible.

"Gladys!" he replies. "Oh, yes! I haven't seen her yet."

Gladys is by his side, and he turns, and shakes her hand warmly, and says, "Thank you, Gladys, thank you, I have heard all; but we will talk of this another time."

"Best now, father, whilst I remember. She may stay? You like to have her?"

"Of course, of course, my dear."

Mr. Prothero glances rather uneasily at the very lady-like looking young woman, for whom

he is thus humbly petitioned, and in doing so spies Owen close behind her.

His feelings are too much softened by Netta to allow him to feel angry, still he does not know what to make of it. Mrs. Prothero kisses Gladys, and Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan shake hands with her.

"Nothing like the present time," thinks Owen; but Gladys declares decidedly that Netta ought to go to her room, and everybody yields to her calm, assured voice.

"Then you will stay with us?" asks gentle Mrs. Prothero, looking the while at her husband.

"To be sure she will," says Mr. Prothero.

"Thank you, Sir; thank you, Ma'am. I shall be only too glad," replies Gladys, as humbly as if she were really the servant she professes to be. "Miss Gwynne will allow me to stay, if you wish it."

After they had been up-stairs, they returned to tea, and Mr. Prothero could not quit Netta, but sat watching her with a painful anxiety.

She was greatly excited, and her mind and eyes appeared equally to wander on the objects of

her childhood. She asked her father a variety of questions concerning scenes and people that she felt were particularly associated with him, and he was quite overcome.

When the meal was finished, Owen carried Netta at once to her room, and all the womankind accompanied her. It was then that poor Mr. Prothero's wrath and grief exploded. Left alone with his brother, he vented both in language which, as Owen had expressed it, needed clerical revision. But Mr. Jonathan knew that it must have its course, before exhortations could take effect. He paced up and down the room venting curses loud and deep upon Howel, and bemoaning his unfortunate daughter. At last he sat down and cried bitterly.

It was then that his brother drew near to comfort, and that Owen returned to the room.

"So young, so pretty--our only girl! God only knows how I love her—to come to die! Driven mad by that heartless villain—curse him, a thousand—."

"Hush, brother! hush! you cannot alter the past. Home and a father's and mother's love will soon bring her round, poor dear."

"Do you think so! why she looks like a corpse. No rose was redder when she went away, when I kissed her the night before. And now! and now! I say again, curse the man. I can't help it, brother; I won't help it."

"Come father! let us hope the best, now we have her home again."

Owen put his hand on his father's shoulder as he spoke; but there was no comfort for that sorrowing parent. While he cursed Howel, there was much self-reproach within him for long-harboured feelings of anger and unforgiveness against his daughter. He even began to think, that if he had been gentle and kind, he might have saved her. The proud hearts of parent and child were alike subdued by heavy sorrow.

The following day, Netta was unable to leave her bed. Excitement and fatigue had been too much for her. Dr. Richards was sent for, who shook his head, and ordered quiet and rest. Mrs Prothero and Gladys were with her, and as she was continually sleeping, no one else was admitted. Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan left early, after having made friends with Minette, who

confided to them that she liked them better than grandpapa and grandmamma, because they were gentlefolks. She didn't know why there was no carpet in the hall, and didn't like stones to her feet. She promised to go and see them when her mamma was better. The worthy couple took to her, as they had done to her mother.

In a day or two Netta was much better, and able to be brought down stairs. Matters gradually settled into their regular course at the Farm, and all went on as usual. Mr. Prothero spent every spare moment with Netta and his grandchild, who soon forgot that "grandfather," as he insisted on her calling him, "talked loud, and had large, rough hands." Gladys slipped, imperceptibly, into her old place, and alternately nursed Netta and helped Mrs. Prothero in the dairy. Owen found many opportunities of entreating Gladys to let him speak to his father, but she positively forbade him, as long as there was painful anxiety about Netta; and, at the same time, angered him, by refusing to consider him as her accepted lover until his father's consent was obtained. Mrs. Prothero schooled her

aching heart into outward calm, but her white hair and pale face, showed what she had gone through, and was still suffering. Howel's name was never mentioned, except between Netta and Gladys It was to Gladys that poor Netta opened her mind, and poured out all her hopes and fears about Howel's return.

The state of that mind varied continually. Sometimes it was tolerably clear, at others sadly wandering, and the least excitement produced faintness and pain at the heart; still her friends fancied she gained strength.

She had the sofa placed so that she could look out of the parlour-window upon the distant hills. The weather cleared up brisk and bright. The red and yellow foliage that still remained to cover the huge trunks of the oaks shone in the sunlight, and the lights and shadows danced upon the mountains A few white chrysanthemums, and one or two roses still looked in at the window, upon her who had once been the brightest flower of Glanaravon.

Netta had been at home a fortnight, and was really stronger and better. The sun was setting behind those distant hills, and casting glorious

shades of red, purple and gold, upon them. She was gazing wistfully on the sky, and thinking of Howel, whilst Minette was sitting on a stool at her feet, turning over a book, out of which she had been reading to her mother, whose chief occupation was trying to teach her.

Mr. Prothero came in and took his customary seat at the head of her sofa. He was followed, almost instantly, by Gladys, who called Minette out to have her cup of warm milk fresh from the cow, ordered by her doctor.

"Father," began Netta, abruptly, "I have something to say to you."

"Well, Netta fach!" said her father, cheerfully. "Say away. I'm all attention."

"Do you like Gladys, father?"

"Of course I do, my dear. Who could help it? She's an excellent young 'ooman."

"I wish you would promise me one thing, father, before I go away."

"But you are not going away ever again, my love?"

"Perhaps I may—far, far away; and perhaps I may go to heaven. I don't know. But I

should like, when I go away, to leave you a better daughter than I have ever been to you. One that will take care of you and mother, and my Minette, as long as you and she live; who will make Owen a good wife, and a happy man, as he is now, a good son and brother. Father, will you take her for my sake?"

"My darling, I don't know what you mean?"

"I mean—You won't be cross, father bach?"

"Never again with you, Netta, please God."

"Will you promise to grant me this great favour, now that my head is clear, and I have no pain, and can ask it right?"

"There is little I 'ould refuse you, Netta; but I should rather hear it first."

"It is about Owen and Gladys, father. They have loved one another ever since they were first together. I found it out in the train; and when Owen pressed Gladys very hard to tell him why she didn't love him, she said it was because she had promised you something. I could not hear what; but I heard enough to know that she loved Owen dearly. And she is good and clever; and, oh! so kind and gentle to me. I never think now of what I used to think

so much—how she was a beggar at our gate ; and everybody in London looks up to her and loves her. Mr. and Mrs. Jones, Miss Gwynne, and Rowland, all treat her like a lady. I should die, I think I should, so much happier, or go away when I am fetched, so much happier, if I could know she was with you, as a daughter. I have been very disobedient and wilful , but she has been obedient and grateful, though she was not your child. When I left mother to die of fever, she nursed her and saved her life. May God forgive me, for Christ's sake, and bless her! She has made Owen steady. She has nursed the sick. She has taught in the poor, wretched London ragged-schools, as well as in the others. She has made clothes for the poor, What has she not done ? Oh, that I were like her! And now she is waiting on me, and helping mother, and nursing my child, like a common servant. Oh, father! take to her instead of me. Indeed, indeed, you will never repent —never !"

As Netta spoke, her wasted cheek flushed, her eyes sparkled, and her manner grew more and more animated. Her father listened atten-

tively, without interrupting her, and when she paused, said,

"Netta fach, are you seure you didn't dream or fancy this? Owen declared to me, Gladys 'ouldn't have him, and didn't love him."

"Because you would not let her, father. Think of her making him believe this, and yet loving him dearly all the time; and because she was too grateful to you and mother to do what you don't like."

"Yes; the girl's a good girl, Netta, I don't deny that; but I can't bear the Irish, and don't want Owen, who is a fine, sensible young man, who might have any respectable young 'ooman to marry a girl nobody knows of, and there's the treuth! If you let him alone, he'd marry Miss Richards."

"Never, father! Only ask him. For my sake—though I don't deserve you should do anything for me."

"There—there; don't you begin to cry, and excite yourself. I'll ask the boy."

"Now, father! He's in the hall; I heard him whistling. Let him come here."

Mr. Prothero went out and called Owen who

came in forthwith. He began the subject at once.

"Owen, Netta has got into her head that you and Gladys are making fools of one another still, in spite of all I said. Is that treue?"

"Not exactly, father. You know I have been in love with Gladys nearly ever since I knew her, and made up my mind never to have anybody else. I don't call that making a fool of her, perhaps it was of myself. She has refused me, without rhyme or reason, more than once; and it was only when we came home with Netta that I found out the reason of her refusal. It is just because she won't marry me without your consent. I have been waiting for her permission to speak to you about this ever since I came home; but she wouldn't let me, because Netta was ill. I must confess to you, honestly, that I would have married her any day these seven years, and worked for her, by sea or land, if she would have had me. But she wouldn't, so there's an end of that. I find, now, that your consent is wanting alone, and I ask it boldly. If you let us marry, you make us happy; if you refuse, you make us miserable,

and send me to sea again—for I don't see that you can expect me to work at home, if you don't try to contribute to my happiness. I am not angry, father, though I can't see what right you had to extract a promise from a girl, to whom you had done a service. That was not generous, or like Prothero, Glanaravon."

"Treue for you there, boy."

Mr. Prothero began to rub his ear; a trick he had when in doubt. Netta, seeing this, put her arms round his neck, and whispered,

"Oh, father! make us happy. He is a good son, father bach."

"Then go you and tell the girl, you may have her, as far as I am concerned," said Mr. Prothero.

"Indeed! father!" said Owen, doubtfully.

"Do you want me to swear, Sir? Upon my deed, then, you may marry the girl. I have but one objection, and that's the way she came here. The girl's a good girl, and I like her well enough. Now, p'r'aps you 'ont go to sea."

"Decidedly not; I'm a steady land-lubber for my life, thank you, father. Shake hands upon it! You won't repent. Kiss me, Netta!

You have done it, I know, and you sha ll danc at the wedding. Now, I'll go and tell Gladys."

Owen and his father shook hands until their arms ached. Then the brother and sister kissed one another, and, with a sort of greyhound leap, or caper, Owen started off in search of Gladys.

"Father, you will never repent it. Thank you a thousand times," said Netta, covering her face with her hands, and bursting into tears.

The worthy farmer cried with her, and thus the father and daughter's love returned and increased.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BETROTHED.

Owen found Gladys in the dairy, with his mother and Minette. She had a candle in one hand, lighting Mrs. Prothero, whilst she was looking at the fresh milk just put into the pans; Minette held the other.

"All right, Gladys! all right! Father has consented!" cried Owen, literally tumbling down the passage between the milk-pans.

Down went a splendid tin of milk right over Minette. Owen didn't mind. His arm was round Gladys' waist, and the candle stowed away somewhere, before any one knew what he was about. Mother and niece saw the long, fervent embrace to which Gladys yielded; but Owen didn't mind that. If all the servants,

domestic and otherwise, had been there, he wouldn't have cared.

"Oh, Mr. Owen!" said Gladys.

"Oh, Mrs. Owen!" said he.

"Mother, she is mine and yours now for ever!" he continued, releasing Gladys somewhat from his firm clasp. "Father has given her to me. I needn't ask you. We will live all together. I will herd the cows, and she shall milk them."

"Come into the kitchen, Owen," said Mrs. Prothero, utterly astonished.

"Uncle, you have wet me all over," sighed Minette.

"Never mind. Come by the fire and dry yourself."

They all went into the kitchen, which was empty. There, by the blazing wood fire, Owen kissed Gladys and his mother and Minette, and Mrs. Prothero kissed Gladys; and the women cried, and Owen laughed. It was a long time before he could explain the real state of the case.

"You are quite sure you love me, Gladys? It is not *gratitude*, but love?" said Owen,

looking into the pure, lustrous "violets dropping dew," that he had studied so long, and so lovingly.

The answering glance, and the quick blush were quite satisfactory.

"Then, will you come with me to father and Netta. We owe it all to her—poor dear Netta!"

"Please to wipe my frock first," said Minette to her grandmother; "and tell me if uncle is going to marry Gladys. I am so glad."

The frock was wiped, and Owen took the child up in his arms, and told her to love her new aunt better than ever.

"I can't love her better, uncle," was the simple assurance of the little girl.

"Nor can I, even as my daughter," said Mrs. Prothero, pressing the hand she held with a mother's love.

They all went to the parlour, where Mr. Prothero and Netta were sitting, quite silent, by the fire-light.

Owen led Gladys to his father, who did not well know what to do on the occasion, not being quite

satisfied with the respectability of the parentage of his future daughter-in-law.

Gladys summoned all her courage, and standing before Mr. Prothero, said, firmly,

"You will be glad, Sir, to know that I have found my friends, and that they acknowledge me as their relation. I could never have consented to bring disgrace upon you and yours. I do not think I could have accepted your present great kindness even, had I not been able to make my truth as clear as the noon-day. Mr. Jones, with whom Miss Gwynne and I have been living so long, is my uncle—my mother's own brother."

The general exclamations of surprise may be imagined.

"The girl's dreaming, like Netta," from Mr. Prothero.

"Why didn't you tell me before?" from Owen.

"I knew she was true," from Mrs. Prothero.

"How can this be, Gladys?" from Netta.

Gladys told her story simply. Every one was too much engrossed with it, to think of the pretty picture that wondering family group

made; but as we know it already, we will look at the picture whilst she is telling her tale.

The large, old-fashioned sofa is placed at one side of the fire-place, its head against the wall, its foot towards the window, so as to give Netta warmth and the view of the distant hills, at the same time. Between the head of the sofa and the fire-place is an arm-chair, also against the wall, Mr. Prothero's favourite seat; and Minette's footstool is by the side of her mother, and at the feet of her grandfather.

Netta's pale face is in shadow, but the large, bright black eyes beam upon Gladys, with preternatural lustre, and the raven hair shines against the white pillow that supports her head. The broad, massive figure of the father, in its rough work-a-day clothes, is also in shadow. One elbow rests upon the arm of Netta's sofa, one hand smooths mechanically the head of his grandchild, resting against his knee. This large hand and that tender head come within the glow of the firelight. His grey head is lifted towards Gladys, on whom his keen black eyes, so like Netta's, are also fixed. Minette, too, sitting at his feet, gazes with child-like

wonder on Gladys; her long black curls falling over her pale face. Grandsire, daughter, child, so like one another, and yet so far apart in age. Three types they are of the ancient Briton.

Opposite this trio, with her left hand clasped in that of Netta, and close to her sofa, stands the fair, blue-eyed, graceful Gladys; thoroughly Irish in beauty, if Welsh in heart. The red glare of the large bright fire brings out her sweet, earnest face, and slight form. Her eyes are cast down, as if they cannot support the gaze of so many other eyes, and her cheeks are flushed with a strange excitement. Towering a full head above her, his arm round her waist, the thick black beard touching her hair, is the manly, handsome Owen. Love, joy, pride, in his honest black eyes, and health on his bronzed and ruddy cheeks Seated on the sofa, her arms on Netta's knees, her head, with its silver hair, and plain white lace cap, eagerly pressed forward, is the well-beloved mother. For the first time since Netta's return, grief for the one child, has merged into joy for the other, and prayer and praise for all are in her heart even whilst she listens.

The story is told, Gladys raises her eyes and head somewhat proudly for her. Owen lowers his, and kisses the pure, white forehead. There is silence for a few moments, no one can speak for tears. Owen is the first.

"Well, father! all's right now, at any rate."

"Treue for you there, Owen my boy. The only objection is removed, everybody will know now that Gladys was honest. God bless you both, and make you happy."

At this moment there was a suppressed sob from Netta. Her mind had wandered from the open, straight-forward betrothal of Owen and Gladys, crowned, after years of difficulty, with a father's and mother's blessing, to her own unhallowed marriage—to her lost husband.

Again poor Netta was the object of every one's thoughts. Gladys forgot herself, and Owen his joy, to cheer and comfort her.

It was in private that Mrs. Prothero poured out her feelings to Gladys, and assured her of her unbounded satisfaction in the prospect of such a daughter. It was also in private that Netta solemnly gave her child into Gladys' care. She said :

"If I die, Gladys, you are to be her mother. You are to bring her up; she is never to leave you. If Howel comes back, say to him this was my wish. But I will write it for him. You must teach her to love her father, and to pray for him; and when she is old enough to be firm in her duty, to go to him if he wishes it. But never let Aunt 'Lizbeth have her—never. I *must* see Aunt 'Lizbeth, I must tell her my wishes myself; you must talk to her, Gladys, she must not have my child if I die."

Owen and Minette went together to see poor Mrs. Griffey. They found her much altered, Owen could scarcely recognise the brisk, handsomely-dressed Aunt 'Lizbeth who came to announce her son's gay wedding to Mrs. Prothero, in that son's mother, as stricken by his crime. Moreover, there was a very strong smell of spirits in the room, and Owen perceived a bottle and glass, that had been hastily put aside, under a table in the corner.

Mrs. Jenkins cried a great deal when she saw Minette, and Owen was soon very sorry that he had brought the child. However,

he told her to go to a small inner room, the window of which looked into the street, and her attention was soon quite absorbed. Her grandmother was in a maudlin condition, out of which, under any other circumstances, Owen would have extracted mirth, but now he only felt anger and sorrow.

"Have you heard anything of Howel, Aunt 'Lizbeth?" he asked.

"Oh, *annwyl!* No. Mr. Rice Rice is telling me there is a 'ditement brought against him for forgery, and now they can be taking him anywhere, and bringing him to trial as soon as they do find him. Forgery! name o' goodness why 'ould he be forging, as I do say to every one, and his own mother as 'ould be giving him thousands of pounds. My Howels! Ach a fi! for sham to them! But he 'ont be found guilty, if they do tak him. Owen bach! it was killing me, 'deet to goodness, it was."

"Don't cry, Aunt 'Lizbeth, I wanted to speak to you about Netta."

"Oh seure! she 'ont come to see her hus-

band's mother! and I dont be cheusing to be turned out of doors again."

"She is very ill, aunt. We dont know whether she can ever recover. Her mind is wandering, and has been ever since that—Howel left her; she thinks he is gone for debt, and if she knew the real state of the case, it would probably be the death of her. If we could manage a meeting between you, could you speak only of Howel's debts, and not of this terrible suspicion."

"Seurely I could; but I 'ont go to Glanaravon; if your father was turning me out of doors then, what will he be doing now?"

"We must see, Aunt 'Lizbeth; poor Netta sends her love to you, and begs you to keep up; she says she is sure Howel will come back; I was to tell you this."

"Netta! Netta! poor dear, poor dear."

Mrs Jenkins began to rock herself to and fro in her chair violently, and to cry hysterically.

"He was very fond of her, Owen; you dont think she'll be dying? I do be wishing all day long that she hadn't gone off with him, and that

my Griffey hadn't left all that money—and—and—tak you a glass of brandy and water, Owen, it'll be warming you after your cold walk, and I do feel so poorly and wretched all over, that I'll be having a drop along."

"No thank you, aunt, we must be going; what of the counsel for Howel?"

"Oh, I do be having the best in all London; Prince Albert or Queen Victoria 'ouldn't be having a better; to think of him as was dining with them wanst."

"Don't believe such nonsense, Aunt 'Lizbeth."

"Was you thinking that my Howels is not telling the treuth? But I am seure they 'ont be finding him; they was telling me that America, where they do think he is gone. is bigger than all Wales, and England, and London put together. Oh, if I could be going to him, I 'ouldn't be vexing shocking, as I was now. All that money that my Griffey was putting by in pence and sixpences, and shillings, all gone, and he no better, and Howels no better, and I no better, 'scept that I did be seeing London. Come you, Owen, tak you a drop of brandy

and water. I do tak it very kind of you to be coming to see me."

"What message shall I give Netta, Aunt 'Lizbeth?"

"Give you her my love, and I'll be seeing her whenever she do like. Tell you her that Howels shall be having every penny his poor old mother do own to set him right again; he'll be seure to be proving himself right, come you. Them Simpsons and Spendalls were always living upon him, and now to be turning against him. Ach a fi! now do be taking a drop before you do go."

"No thank you, Aunt 'Lizbeth; and I don't think spirits good for you. You had better be careful."

"I don't be drinking a wine-glass full in a week but when I am having the spasms, and now I am vexing so, they was coming oftener than they was eused to."

Owen left Mrs. Jenkins with a heavy heart, foreseeing her end; Minette said she didn't like her because she smelt so of wine, and wasn't a lady.

The next day but one, Gladys went to see

her, and did what she could to comfort and help her; she was used to all sorts of sorrow and sin, and was so gentle a consoler, and so christian an adviser, that poor Mrs. Jenkins asked her to come and stay with her always; but that could not be; she went, however, as often as she could leave Netta.

Netta's will and word was now law with her father; he refused her nothing; he even allowed her to see her mother-in-law, provided the meeting was managed when he was from home. It was so managed, and a melancholy meeting it proved; the old woman's tears and sobs were so irrepressible, that Gladys was obliged to shorten it as much as possible; Netta, however, was calmer than she expected.

"Mother," she said, "I want you to promise me one thing. If I die—"

"Oh, Netta fach! why was you talking of dying? you 'ont be dying."

"I said *if*, mother. I wish Gladys, who is going to marry Owen—"

"Gladys, Owen! name o' goodness! and your father! he 'ouldn't let you marry my Howels, and she—"

"Is very good, mother, whilst I was very bad. But I wish her and Owen to bring up my child; you must tell Howel so, when he comes back; and when she is grown up, she will be a comfort to you and him. My head is confused; I dreamt last night, Howel was here, and he was going to take away Minette. Is he with you, mother? tell me! do you know where he is? Oh! if I could see him once more! once more!"

"He is being safe in America, Netta fach, but is coming home soon I am thinking. Don't you be dying; he was doating upon you, and if he do come home, and don't be finding you, he'll be dying too."

"Are you sure he will come back? did he tell you so himself?"

"To be seure. He is coming back soon, only he must be paying his debts first. Come you!"

Mrs. Jenkins' unmitigated falsehoods did Netta a great deal of good; they cheered her, and gave her hope for the time. Gladys doubted whether hopes so based, and to be so miserably crushed, were to be encouraged, but she had not the heart to undeceive her.

When Mr. Prothero returned home that evening, he was surprised to see Netta looking so much more cheerful than she had done since her return.

"Better, much better," was her answer to his eager look of enquiry. "And now I am better, I have another favour to ask. I want to see Owen and Gladys married while I am here. I think it would almost cure me to feel that I had helped to do one kind and right thing in my wrong life. Would you mind it, father?"

"I shall be very glad to see them married, my dear; the sooner the better. Owen's good-for-nothing now but sitting with his arm round Gladys' waist all day long, and I hate those sort of follies."

"Oh! Davy," said Mrs. Prothero, "young people will be young people, and I'm sure no one can be so modest as Gladys."

"Well, I'm of Netta's opinion, and the sooner they're married the better. I must confess, now I know who Gladys is, there isn't a girl in all the country I like so well. And Mr. and Mrs. Jones have written as a gentleman and lady ought to write, owning her, and giving

their free consent to her marrying our Owen. So, Netta fach, if you can get the young folks' consent you have mine."

Owen and Gladys had accompanied Mrs. Jenkins part of the way home. She had particularly asked Gladys to "send her," and as it was getting dusk, Owen had "sent her" also. They returned during the conversation respecting their marriage, and Mr. Prothero who had forgotten, if he had ever experienced, the shyness of affianced lovers, began the subject at once.

"Netta wants you two young people to be married directly, so do I. I shall be glad when 'tis all over. What do you say to it?"

They had nothing to say. Gladys blushed, and Owen felt awkward on her account, not his own.

"There, I always said that lovers were fools," said Mr. Prothero.

"We will settle it another time," said Netta.

"Go you and settle it directly," said Mr. Prothero; "what my little girl here says, is law in this house."

Poor Netta always began to cry when her father said anything particularly kind. She did so now. There was a reaction on her spirits, and she suddenly became as depressed as she had previously been gay. The constantly recurring contrasts between herself and Gladys continually affected her, and her father's readiness for the marriage reminded her of the scenes between him and herself previously to her own.

The topic was given up for that evening, but the following morning Netta renewed it with Owen, who declared himself ready to marry Gladys that very moment.

The upshot of it all was, that the wedding was settled for New Year's Day at Netta's particular request. No one cared, or indeed thought what the world would say at a marriage taking place during a period of such heavy affliction. Netta willed it, and to give her pleasure, and an object for her poor wandering mind, every member of the family, would have made any sacrifice ; and this was not a sacrifice, at all, but an event of importance to all.

Mr. and Mrs. Jones promised to come if only

for one clear day, and sent a box of presents to their niece, which Netta had the pleasure of unpacking. Amongst them was a simple and pretty wedding dress and bonnet, that poor Netta wept over, thinking of her own.

On the whole, however, Netta was better and more cheeful, and even assisted in the preparations that were going forward. She helped to make that pretty, dove coloured silk dress that was manufactured at home, and tried to join in the happiness which her apparently improved health seemed to make allowable.

But Netta's heart was with Howel, and the certainty that she felt of his return and constant love, alone sustained her. Alas! that poor, fluttering, uncertain heart!

CHAPTER XII.

THE HEIR.

Miss Gwynne returned to Glanaravon on Christmas Eve. She had not visited it before, since she left it when her father married. She had seen her father, his wife, and her little brother almost yearly in London, whither Lady Mary Nugent insisted on dragging her husband annually; but she had not hitherto had love, or courage, or christian charity enough to visit them at home. When last in town, and repeatedly by letter, her father had urged her doing so, and she had at last complied with his request, more from a latent sense of duty than from inclination.

It was a bright, frosty night when the carriage that had been sent to meet her drove up to

the door. If poor Netta had fainted on returning to the Farm, Freda was obliged to brush away gathering tears as she returned to the Park. Every branch of tree as it glittered in the moonlight in its dress of hoar frost was familiar to her, every pane of glass in the windows of the old place seemed a friend.

On the lowest step, bare-headed and expectant, were the old butler and footman she had left when she went away; she shook hands with each, and they almost rung her hand off. In the door-way stood her father, not bare-headed, but expectant, who received her with paternal warmth. Freda knew that he must for once have forgotten himself and his nervous debility to have thus exposed himself to the frosty air. In the hall was Lady Mary ready with smiles and embraces, with which Freda would glady have dispensed; but she did her best to seem, if she could not feel, glad to see her.

Her ladyship preceded her to her own old bed-room, where a huge fire, and bright wax candles bade her welcome, and whither she was followed by Frisk, who was exuberant in his demonstrations of delight at his return home after his long absence.

"I have ordered my maid to wait on you my dear," said Freda's stepmother, "because I find yours does not return to you. But we can replace her. Dinner will be ready whenever you are; can I do anything for you?"

"No, thank you, I shall not be long," said Freda mechanically.

Lady Mary left the room.

Freda felt that her tact was good after all; for no nice feeling could have been more successful than it was. She had received her just as if she had come home after a short absence. No demonstrations of any kind; her room was much as it had ever been. There were even some of her clothes in the wardrobe.

"I won't cry! I won't give way!" muttered Freda, beginning to take off her wrappings.

There was a tap at the door.

"Come in!" And Anne the old housemaid appeared.

"Oh, Miss, I am so glad to see you home again, it do seem so natural. Please to let me unpack your things, Miss. My lady thought you might like me better than Mrs. Pink."

"Thank you, Anne, it does look like home to see you."

"Shall I get your dress, Miss?"

"I can't dress to-night, I am too tired. There, that will do. Now I will go down stairs."

She did so, and found her father alone in the library.

"I won't cry," again she said, as she kissed him affectionately.

"Thank you for coming, Freda, it will do me good, and my wife is delighted. Harold, too, is in extacies, and only went to bed with a promise that sister Freda—he calls you sister, you know, and—and all that sort of thing."

The "my wife," grated strangely on Freda's ear, but she promised to go and see her little brother.

Lady Mary came in, and they went to dinner.

It seemed strange to see her at the head of the table, and Freda felt as if she were in a dream. But nothing could be more perfect than her Ladyship's manner. She behaved as if nothing had ever happened to cause the least estrangement between them, and almost as if she were still Lady Mary Nugent. Handsome as

ever, and perfectly well-bred, she almost made even Freda believe, after her long absence from her, that she really was what she seemed. However, Freda tried to take her as she was, and to feel thankful that she was no worse. It was she who principally kept up the conversation; Freda made great efforts, and signally failed, and Mr. Gwynne never talked much.

After dinner, Freda proposed to go and see the little brother. As she looked at the magnificent boy who lay peacefully sleeping in his little crib, she was thankful to be able to kiss him, and say, "God bless you, my brother," without feeling angered that he had deprived her of the inheritance she had once been so proud of. She knew that Lady Mary was watching her narrowly, but there was no hypocrisy in her affection, so she did not care.

They went down to the library, where were Mr. Gwynne, tea and coffee.

"Is he not a splendid fellow, my dear?" said Mr. Gwynne.

"He certainly is, papa," replied Freda, aloud, saying inwardly, "and everything with you

now. I am quite second—third I ought to say."

This was true; Mr. Gwynne was proud of his wife and son. The former took care of him, and did not greatly interfere with his pursuits or peculiarities, the latter gave him new life and hopes. An heir in his old age was a gift that might well exceed that of the daughter who could not perpetuate his name.

Freda was glad when she went to bed, which she did as soon as tea was over. It was a great relief to sit down once more in the easy chair which had helped to nurse so many crude fancies and humours in days gone by, and think over the past and present. There was an atmosphere of unreality about everything at Glanaravon, that she hoped to clear off on the morrow, so she resolved to try not to feel depressed under its influence; but having once known what it was to enjoy living with real, working men and women, with aims beyond the formalities of society, it seemed hard to be thrown back upon the cold worldliness of her step-mother, and the selfish nervousness of her father.

She was, however, aroused on the blessed morning of Christmas Day, by something that was very real.

"A merry Kismas, sister Freda," shouted a sharp little voice into her ear, and before her eyes were half opened, brisk little feet were stamping at her bedside, and the same voice authoritatively, enouncing, "put me up, Dane, I 'ull be put up."

"I beg your pardon, Miss," said the nurse who stood in the doorway, "but Master Harold would come, and my lady isn't up, and—"

"Never mind, put him up," said Freda, sitting up in bed, and opening her arms to receive the rosy, wilful, handsome child, who did not know how he had supplanted her.

"A merry Kismas!" he repeated, returning Freda's kisses, by pulling off her night-cap, and letting down her long hair before she knew what he was about "Now I'll dive 'ou to Tewey."

"Master Harold! don't Sir!" said the nurse.

But Master Harold was jumping on the pillow behind his sister, making reins of her hair, and horses of her head, in no very gentle fashion.

"I shan't give you what I brought you from London if you pull my hair," said Freda, catching the bare, firm, sturdy leg of the small tyrant who called her sister.

"Is it soldiers?" asked the child, suddenly tumbling down before her.

She caught the little fellow in her arms, and told him, that if he would go away whilst she dressed, he should have the present. After some demur, he consented, having first informed Freda, that "ittle Minnie, and Winnie, and Dot, and baby," were all coming to dinner.

"A family party!" groaned Freda, when the child was carried away by its nurse, "myself the only rightful member of the family, and, probably, the only one who will feel as if she doesn't belong to it."

Freda got up, and looked out upon the fine park, and the hills beyond. She sighed involuntarily.

"Why should I sigh!" she said, "I am happier than when it was my home; happier, and, I hope, more useful. My father doesn't want me—" here she paused. Perhaps that father really did want her, for she, at least,

loved him, and his wife did not; and she was beginning to be conscious, daily more and more conscious, of the exceeding preciousness of love.

Breakfast passed, with the same effort to feel at home, on her part, and attempt to keep up a conversation on that of Lady Mary, as had the dinner of the previous day.

Harold made a diversion by bursting into the room to ask for his soldiers. He, at least, was quite natural, and entirely spoilt.

Immediately after breakfast, they drove to church. It was delightful to Freda to see the good vicar in the reading-desk, and his wife in the pew beneath. She felt at home again for the first time. For the first time, also, she really listened to the worthy man's somewhat dry sermon, and strove to feel "in charity with all men" on that blessed day. She thought once or twice of a sermon Rowland had preached that day twelvemonth, which had riveted the attention of his large congregation, and made her wonder whence he had received the gift, by half-an-hour's plain, eloquent preaching, of opening the heart to receive truths, hitherto more understood than felt. Rowland had be-

come to her, and many, the type of a preacher and minister of the Gospel, and to him she owed, under God, the fuller enlightenment and enlargement of her own mind.

After the service was over, she went into the Vicarage. Here, again, she was at home. She had much to tell Mrs. Prothero of the kindness of Sir Philip Payne Perry and his wife to her, and many messages to deliver from them. She had, also, to hear Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan's opinion of Netta, and of the approaching wedding. She avoided any word that could recall Howel.

"I hope you are not displeased with the match?" said Freda.

"By no means," was Mrs. Jonathan's reply. "I always thought Gladys very superior, and her turning out to be Mr. Jones's niece, removes our only objection. It is quite a romance!"

"She is a clever young woman," said Mr. Jonathan; "I was surprised the other day to find how much history she knew. As to Wales, she has it by heart, and is not wholly unacquainted with the antiquities of the country. It was quite a pleasure for me, Miss

Gwynne, I assure you, to meet with any one who took so much interest in ancient lore. And now she is to be one of the family she is so much more at her ease. Actually asked me, of her own accord, of the fossils in the Park quarry, and a very acute question concerning the Lords of the Marches. She even knew that her name, Gladys, meant Claudia, and that the original Gladys is, probably, the very Claudia mentioned by St. Paul."

"We shall all be thrown into the shade now, Mrs. Prothero," said Freda, laughing. "Gladys will evidently be the favourite."

"I am afraid I must break up your conversation, my love," interrupted Lady Mary, "you can drive or ride over to finish it when you like."

On their way home, her Ladyship remarked, "I suppose this unfortunate discovery concerning Mr. Howel Jenkins, will quite ruin Mr. Rowland Prothero's position in London society?"

"He is scarcely in what is called 'society;' but his friends are not likely to be changed by the conduct of his brother-in-law. He is far

too highly esteemed and admired to be injured by such a man as Howel Jenkins."

Freda felt the blood rush to her cheeks, and was convinced that Lady Mary noticed it.

"I am glad to hear you say so, my dear," said Mr. Gwynne. "He is a great favourite of mine, and I should be sorry to think his prospects were injured. They are a rising family. His brother is very much thought of, and improving his own and my property amazingly. A most energetic young man, and so amusing, that he almost kills me whenever I see him. I am glad he is going to marry that pretty Gladys."

When they arrived at home, they found the party from Abertewey ready to receive them, at least, Mrs. Gwynne Vaughan and her children. The Colonel was to join them at dinner.

"Oh, Freda, dear, I am tho glad you are come home again!" lithped Mrs. Gwynne Vaughan. "Tho ith Gwynne. He thaith it will be delightful to have you Thith ith little Gwynne, and thith ith Minnie, and we call thith one, Dot; and baby ith in the nurthery. You

thall thee her by and bye. Kith Aunt Freda, Minnie—they all call you Aunt Freda, you know."

Freda, not at all rejoicing in the honour, stooped to kiss all the pretty little children by turns, and had soon made friends with them all. The children were the greatest possible relief to her, she turned to them as a sort of neutral ground, between the war in her own heart, and the tact and inanity of her step-mother and step-sister.

The latter was as unchanged as the former. Very handsome, very fashionably dressed, very good tempered; in short Miss Nugent, simply turned into Mrs. Vaughan. Freda wondered how the really clever and agreeable Colonel Vaughan could live with so dull a companion.

Having got through luncheon and the afternoon somehow, thanks to the children, the dinner hour arrived, and therewith the Colonel. Freda always felt reserved with him, and his studied kindness and politeness to her when she had met him, occasionally, in London irritated her. She had spoken to him before his marriage so unreservedly of his wife, and had given

him to understand so unmistakeably, that she knew what had passed between him and Gladys, that she fancied he must, at heart, cordially dislike her. Moreover, she had loved him. Much as she despised herself now for having done so, she knew it, and she despised him all the more on that account.

There was, however, no mistaking the real warmth of his welcome, and for the moment—only for the moment, Freda's heart beat quick.

"I am so glad to see you, Freda—sister Freda, you know now; and looking so well."

"Yeth, ith'nt the looking well. I think the lookth younger than when the went away."

"Handsomer, at any rate. I may pay you a compliment now, Freda."

Freda could not return it. Colonel Vaughan looked more than six years older since his marriage, and there was a dissatisfied expression on his countenance, very different from the old suavity

Freda was not long in discovering that if he had improved his fortune by marriage, he had not improved his temper, or increased his happiness. Fortunately for his wife, her imper-

turbable placidity, and want of acute feeling prevented her from appropriating many hard hits from her husband that would have made Freda wretched.

Again, she admired the tact of the mother. By it she managed her husband admirably, and retained her power over him in precisely the same way as she did before she married him; while Wilhelmina wholly lost what little she had gained over hers' prior to her marriage. Her silliness annoyed him continually, and her beauty, for want of expression, palled upon his fastidious taste.

Freda's contempt very soon turned to pity. The handsome, fascinating, deceitful Colonel was amply indemnified for all the hearts he had broken, and those broken hearts fully avenged by the tedium of his home life.

Of course, Freda did not discover all this during that one Christmas-day, but it developed itself during her subsequent stay at Glanaravon.

"We did not ask any one else to dinner to-day, Gwynne," said Mr. Gwynne, "because we thought Freda would like to have us alone, you know, and see the children, and—and all that sort of thing."

"I hope Freda enjoys a family-party better than I do," said the Colonel, looking at her as he spoke. "Of all things on earth, it is the slowest."

"Complimentary," said Lady Mary.

"Oh! Gwynne ith alwayth tho fond of thaying what he doth'nt mean. He often doth to me, don't you, my dear? But I don't mind, becauth I underthand him now."

Freda looked at Mrs. Vaughan to see if she spoke ironically. Not at all. She fully believed what she said. Colonel Vaughan saw the glance, and smiling, said,

"All in good faith, I assure you."

Freda blushed, and to turn the conversation began to talk to him of his children, and to praise their beauty. He smiled again, as perfectly understanding her ruse.

"People call them loves and angels!" he said, "and even go into raptures over the baby. For my part, I never look at them when they are babies. Indeed, I don't like children, and all ours are so spoilt. Wilhelmina doesn't know how to manage them, and now their governess is away, the house is like a lunatic asylum."

"Oh, Gwynne, how abthurd you are! He

ith tho fond of them, Freda, you can't think, and they are thuch little dearth."

"I was greatly amused," said Freda, "to hear Minnie call Harold 'Uncle' just now; and he seemed not a little proud of his dignity."

"Surely, Freda, you haven't learnt to talk baby talk!" said Colonel Vaughan. "You used to eschew such twaddle."

"It was time for me to learn to like a great many things that I professed to hate. I hope I am improved since I was here last. But I always liked children."

"Oh! Harold is so fond of her," said Mr. Gwynne. "He is a wonderful boy."

Here followed a history of various achievements of Harold, during which Colonel Vaughan vainly endeavoured to catch Freda's eye. She was only too well-disposed to smile at the infatuation of the doating father.

"Here are the children, I think," said Lady Mary.

In bounded Harold, and jumped unbidden on Freda's lap.

"I ull have some of that—and that," said Harold.

"And I will have—" began Minnie.

"You will have nothing if you ask for it," said the Colonel with a frown.

His little trio were quiet in a moment.

"Ganpapa, take me up," said Dot, creeping round to Mr. Gwynne.

Freda felt her blood creep at that word "grandpapa," and also felt the Colonel's glance. He seemed to take a pleasure in watching every expression of her countenance, and it did, unfortunately, always convey her feelings to the watcher.

Freda had never passed so uncomfortable a dinner, since the day when the present Mrs. Vaughan came of age. Probably she was the only one of the party who was conscious of Colonel Vaughan's changed manner and temper, because it was new to her, and she could scarcely believe him to be himself. Her father was wrapped up in his boy—his wife's attention was divided between him and the other child, and Mrs. Vaughan smiled and lisped on all by turns.

Freda thought of old times, when her father and herself were so happy together; and then

she thought of the last Christmas-Day in London, when Mr. and Mrs. Jones, Rowland, and herself, dined late off a Glanaravon Park turkey, having first feasted as many poor people as the kitchen would hold, on geese from Glanaravon Farm. Certainly the comparison with her present companions was "odious" to her.

Freda scarcely knew which was worst—the riotous, untameable spirits of Harold, who did and said what he liked, unchecked either by father or mother, or the cowed and altered manner of the other children in the presence of their father; they, too, had been noisy enough before he arrived.

"It was very good of you to come to-day, Gwynne," said Lady Mary, "I scarcely expected you, knowing how you dislike this frosty weather."

"Freda is attraction enough to draw off the frost, though she has become so much better than her neighbours. Wilhelmina, my dear, why do you let Minnie stuff her mouth so full of orange? The child will choak."

The dinner came to an end at last, and the children went to bed. Freda played and sung some sacred music, at Colonel Vaughan's re-

quest, and he complimented her on her improvement, and said he wished his wife played and sung so well, because music was such a resource in a dull country place.

"I suppose you have practised a great deal since you have been in London?" said the Colonel.

"Mrs. Jones and I play and sing whenever we have time, and I have had some lessons," replied Freda. "Besides, one hears all the first musicians and singers, and they teach one."

"Did you see much of that young parson, Prothero? I remember he was somewhere in your neighbourhood," asked the Colonel.

Freda was sure this question was a feeler, and she answered carelessly,

"Yes, naturally. He is Mr. Jones's brother curate."

"Now confess, you didn't like those people, and that sort of life. You must have been *ennuyée* from morning to night."

"On the contrary, the days were not half long enough."

"Freda!" exclaimed Mrs. Vaughan, "I get tho tired, and tho doth the Colonel, before half the evening ith over."

"Some one else seems in the same condition," said Freda. "Papa is fast asleep."

"And mamma nearly," said Mrs. Vaughan. "And I am tho tired. I think Chrithmath Dayth are very dull. One dothn't know what to do."

"That isn't peculiar to Christmas Days in your year," said the Colonel, sarcastically; "but I suppose we had better go to bed. I hope we shall be more amusing to-morrow, Freda. All your old friends, the constant Sir Hugh amongst them, are invited to meet you. Let me light your candle. Remember, I always used to do that, when we had our snug evenings together such an age ago."

"Yeth, he often talkth of you, Freda, and thayth you were thuch good company."

Freda heard Colonel Vaughan sigh, and thought, as she said "Good night!" and hastened up-stairs, that she ought to be thankful that the imperturbable and dull Wilhelmina Nugent, had been the choice of that discontented and irritable Colonel, instead of the quick-tempered, independent Winifred Gwynne.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.

New Year's Day dawned under the influence of a bright son, and a clear, frosty atmosphere. The old year was dead and buried with all his griefs and joys; his sun and heir came forwards smiling, to begin his career of times and seasons, clouds and sunbeams.

With him, Owen and Gladys were to commence their united lives. An auspicious morning ushered in this, their bridal day, and the Year's birthday. Nature had put on all her jewels in honour of the joint festivities. Her very tears were turned into diamonds that sparkled on her capacious breast, neck, and arms, more brilliantly than stomachers, necklaces and bracelets of gems, on the courtiers of an Indian monarch.

Truly, as the fair and gentle Gladys drove through the roads and lanes that led from the Farm to the church, the hedge-rows sparkled with these brilliants, and her very pathway was strewn with them. Attired in that Quaker-like garb of dove-colour and white, her soft cheek tinged as from the sun, her eyes cast down in modest shyness, and her heart beating with quiet happiness, she seemed a fitting bride to wait upon that heir of so many by-gone generations.

And assuredly a happier never drove to a church to meet her expectant bridegroom, her hand clasped lovingly between the kindly palms of her future mother, sitting by her side; and the affectionate glances of her uncle and aunt cast upon her from the opposite seat. She felt as if it were all a dream. She, the Irish beggar —the friendless—the wanderer—the orphan!

And now so honoured! All whom she most cared for in the world, with the exception of Rowland, were assembled in that village church to meet her There were Owen and his father —Miss Gwynne and Minette—Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan Prothero.

Gentleness, gratitude and simple merit, were, for once rewarded, even in this world.

The kind and worthy Uncle Jonathan—so soon to be *her* uncle—married her. Her own uncle gave her, with prayers and blessings, to him whom she had loved so long and truly—her former mistress, now her fast friend, and another mistress's grandchild, were her bridesmaids.

If a tear gathered in her eye, it was a tear of joy; and there, at the altar, amongst all those to whom she was henceforth to be united by the ties of relationship, she inwardly vowed to devote herself to their happiness, and to the fulfilment of the promises she was making to him who would be one with her for ever.

The churchyard was full of spectators, as the proud and happy Owen led his bride through it to the Vicarage, and the general opinion was, that there had never been married so handsome a couple in the church of Llanfach.

The bells and the sunbeams rang out and shone out together, and all the wedding-party forgot their private sorrows in the joy of the moment.

Even Netta, who had been taken to the Vicarage for the occasion, received them with one of her old bright smiles. She threw her arms round Gladys, and called her 'sister.'

"*My* sister," she said more than once emphatically

And if tears would, from time to time, spring into her eyes, as she contrasted herself with Gladys, she brushed them away, and did her best not to cast a shadow from her grief, on the brightness of a brother's and sister's joy. That little drawing-room at the Vicarage contained as pretty and pleasant a group as could well be seen, of which Owen and Gladys formed the centre figures.

"Now, my good girl, let me give you a real kiss," said honest Mr. Prothero, "and tell you that I am proud of my daughter. Mother, what do you say?"

"I say, thank God for all His mercies," said quiet Mrs. Prothero, shaking Gladys' hand, which she seemed loath to part with.

If there is a great variety of character and feeling displayed in shaking hands, there assuredly is, also, in kissing. Gladys experienced

it in that same little drawing-room, where she submitted her blushing cheeks to all sorts of impressions.

Mr. Prothero gave her three very hearty smacks, which resounded through the room, and seemed to say at once, "I am your father;" his wife's embrace was quieter, but more tender. Mrs. Jonathan stooped majestically, and imprinted her lips patronizingly on the forehead, as much as to say, "I receive you into the family of the Payne Perrys, since you are respectably connected." Mrs. Jones kissed her on the lips, and said, "God bless you, my dear." Miss Gwynne, who hated kissing, and did not consider herself one of the family, looked on, but took no active part. Was that pride? she asked herself afterwards, and the answer was, 'Yes.' As to Mr. Jones, his embrace made Owen exclaim, "It is well I know you are her uncle now. I was as jealous as could be when you kissed her in London." Minette's embrace was a long hug, and when the Vicar came in, he wound up the scene by a salute as original as himself, which called forth the following reproof from his brother.

"Why, man, you don't know how to kiss. You stumbled upon the very tip of her nose, and almost put her eyes out with your spectacles."

Heedless of the interruption, Mr. Jonathan addressed his niece as follows,

"My dear niece, Claudia—I shall henceforth call you by that name, in memory of her of the Epistle, and I so registered it just now, Gladys or Claudia—I wish you and my good nephew, Owen, all happiness and prosperity, both spiritual and temporal. I pray that you may, according to the example of your illustrious namesake, devote yourself to works of piety and hospitality, making your husband's home happy, and keeping a place therein for his and your friends."

"To be sure she will, uncle," said Owen, "and we will have an especial corner for you, called 'the Claudia,' where the little hyprocrite shall talk to you of all the druidical remains, and fossil mammoths, that she pretends to be so interested in."

"You had better come and take off your bonnet now, my dear," said Mrs. Jonathan to the flushed and shy Gladys.

"I hope I shall never be married," whispered Freda to Mrs. Jones, "if I am to undergo that sort of ordeal. But I suppose all brides are not kissed in that way."

Uncle and Aunt Jonathan had prepared a substantial early dinner—they did not dignify it by the name of *déjeuner*, or miscal it breakfast—to which, in the course of an hour or so, the family party sat down, much as they would have sat down to any ordinary dinner. The dining-table just accommodated ten comfortably, and Netta sat in her easy chair by the fire, with a small table by her side, making the eleventh.

Miss Gwynne remained to luncheon only, being engaged to dine at Abertewey, and not considering herself quite as one of the guests. She had come uninvited and unexpected, to show due honour to Gladys and her dear friends, Mr. and Mrs. Jones, and the whole party were gratified by the attention.

The remarks upon her doing so made by her friends at home, were various.

"Freda is certainly very eccentric," said Lady Mary to her husband "Her former maid—your tenant's son—the brother-in-law of that

Howel Jenkins. Do you think it discreet Mr. Gwynne?"

"Why, really, Lady Mary, I didn't think about it. She has always done what she likes; they are very worthy, respectable people, you know, and all that sort of thing."

"Well, if you don't object, of course it is no affair of mine. But it looks very much as if she still thought of Mr. Rowland."

"Oh! an excellent young man. It was only yesterday I saw his name mentioned in the 'Times,' as having attended a large meeting in the place of his Rector, who is ill. It was upon the general question of all sorts of improvements of the low parts of London. I can't exactly remember what they were, religious, and sanitary, and all that sort of thing you know. Well, the thanks of the meeting were awarded him, for his very clear and accurate information, or something of the sort. Very satisfactory you know."

"Oh, very! but that can have nothing to do with Freda."

"She is very good, is Freda, much improved! she never disputes and quarrels with me now.

I hope she will live with us—indeed I cannot pa t with her again."

At Abertewey, Mrs. Vaughan asked the Colonel whether "he thought Freda would come away from that thupid wedding, in time for dinner."

"If she doesn't, I will never ask her here again," was the reply. "Now Freda really is a capital girl, unaffected and sensible; improving every year. I wish all women were more like her."

"Tho do I, Gwynne; the ith very nice, tho kind to the children, and not tho' thatirical to me as the uthed to be. I uthed to be afraid of her, but I am not now, at all. Don't you think thatirical people very dithagreeable; I hope Winnie won't be thatirical, don't you? Mamma thaith—"

"Never mind what she says, my dear, I hope Freda will come. All the people will be so disgusted if she does not, particularly poor Sir Hugh. I wish she would marry him—but she is too good for him. Intellectual people ought not to marry those who have no brains."

"No, thertainly not. Oh! here they are!

Freda and all. I hear her voithe. I am tho' glad."

To Freda's surprise, everyone seemed really glad to see her, and to the surprise of everyone, the more they saw of her, the more they liked her. The very people whom she had shunned as bores, and who had shunned her as "tho thatirical," now became friendly and pleasant to her, and she to them; how it was they could not tell, but various reasons were assigned for the change.

"How altered Miss Gwynne is," said one, "I suppose the birth of the brother has made her more humble."

"Nothing like London to pull the pride out of our country gentry," said a second. "Lords at home, they are only one of a multitude there. Miss Gwynne has learnt her true position at last."

"How much more agreeable Miss Gwynne is," said a fourth. "I suppose it is because she has been living in a clergyman's family, where they are obliged to be pleasant to all the parishioners."

"How much less fastidious, satirical, and

overbearing, Freda Gwynne is," a fourth, "her very countenance is altered; I am sure there has been some great change in her mind."

And thus the neighbours rang the changes upon Freda's change; but Mrs. Gwynne Vaughan had been, perhaps, the nearest to the real cause. She was no longer satirical, no longer striving to find out vulnerable points in people's characters to laugh at; she had learnt to make allowances for others, who in turn made allowances for her. Satirical people are very amusing, but rarely welcome, companions; not that Freda was exactly satirical, but she had the gift of finding out every one's weak points—a good gift to those who will kindly cover the point, but a bad one to such as like to lay it bare.

The party at Abertewey went off very well; the Colonel was in good humour, and devoted to Freda, who tried to treat him as her brother-in-law; and Sir Hugh was more gallant than ever, and long before the evening was over, had managed to tell Freda that he would rather have her without the Park than with it, which Freda pretended to take as a joke on the part of her old admirer.

The following day, Mr. and Mrs. Jones spent at the Park, according to a special invitation from its master and mistress. Lady Mary's attention to Freda's friends, did more towards reconciling her to her step-mother than any thing else; and she even forgot to ask whether it was tact or not. Mr. Jones was obliged to return to London the next day, but at Freda's earnest entreaty, he left his wife behind him for a week, which was spent by her between the Park and Farm very agreeably.

Before she left, Mr. Gwynne had a little private conference with her, to the following effect, and very nervous he was meanwhile.

"I am very much obliged to you and Mr. Jones, I am sure, for your kindness to Freda. I hope you understand how satisfied, and—and —all that sort of thing, you know, I am whilst she is with you."

Mrs. Jones saw that she must say something to help him on.

"We are only too glad to have her society and aid. I assure you she has been invaluable in the parish, and is beloved by every one."

"Exactly; I perceive a wonderful change in her; she is gentler, and less excitable. I feel that you—that your husband—in short, I mean—that—hem—"

"Freda has such a fine natural character, Mr. Gwynne."

"Precisely; I would say that I am convinced you would not influence her, and so forth, in remaining away from—you understand—from me, in short."

"Certainly not. I should be very glad to think that she would return and live happily at her natural home, sorry as I should be to lose her."

"Thank you very much indeed; you have always been her true friend. I am very anxious—so we are all you see—Lady Mary would like a companion—Harold attends to her better than to any one else. I hope you like Harold; ah—yes—he is a fine boy, and so talented; and you know—to be sure. I should wish to have Freda to read with me again; I assure you, I miss her in many ways. And the Colonel, and Mrs. Vaughan—the children—in fact—in short—you understand?"

"Perfectly, and will not throw any obstacle in the way of Freda's remaining at home."

"Thank you, very much. You are a true friend, Mrs. Jones; thank you."

Mrs. Jones made a point of repeating that conversation to Freda, whose look of blank dismay quite startled her.

"Oh! Serena, you want to get rid of me. I could never live this kind of life again. Lady Mary would kill me in another month; not an idea in common. Her daughter is fifty times more endurable, for she is innocent in her silliness. And then that cranky, exigeant Colonel, longing to make love to me if I would let him; the stiff dinner parties, tiresome people, spoilt children—though I do delight in Harold and Winnie, and Gwynne, and Dot, and baby, too for that much—and—"

"And your father," quietly suggested Mrs. Jones.

"I never thought you would wish me to leave you, Serena. Those happy, useful days! The poor, the schools, the church!"

"They are everywhere, my love."

"But so different. I never felt so happy or useful before I lived with you in London."

"The change is in yourself, not in the place."

"Oh! Serena, this is cruel! I could live with my father any where, but the others—impossible."

"Think it over. You know that you have a home with us whenever you like; that it would be my pleasure as well as interest to have you always. That we shall miss you in every possible way; still duty is duty. As long as your father did not care, and Lady Mary was rather glad to have the Park to herself, the thing was, perhaps, different, at any rate Freda was not then the Freda she is now."

"Serena, you are a bitter-sweet, and a horrible little apple that is."

"But they say it makes good cider."

"At any rate you ought not to influence me. I will not decide whilst you are here, and that is all I will promise. If I do, it will be to go to you again undoubtedly. But I will think it over."

That very night before she went to bed, Freda did think it over, sitting by the fire in her delightful, warm, well-lighted, well-furnished bed-room; but she could not come to any de-

termination. She made out a sort of debtor and creditor account in her own head, and cashed it according to her somewhat imperfect notions of book-keeping.

"My father—of course I owe him a great deal in the way of duty and love; but he owes me something for letting me have my own way all my life, bringing me up with the notion that I should be an heiress, and then disappointing me by marrying a woman whom I utterly despise. Lady Mary—I owe her nothing whatever, beyond the common proper treatment that one must give to every one; she, on the contrary, owes me compensation for marrying my father, when I am sure he didn't want her, and certainly I did not.

"Colonel Williams—I don't owe him anything beyond a little improvement in my style of singing and drawing; yes, I owe him a heavy debt of gratitude for not proposing for me instead of Wilhelmina, for assuredly I should have married him, and he owes me something for making a fool of me. Wilhelmina—I owe her a good deal, firstly, for despising her, laughing at her, ridiculing her—and she all the time better than I was, for she never retaliated—and

secondly, for trying to prejudice the Colonel against her. Harold—I owe him the love of a sister, and he owes me nothing as yet; here I am decidedly debtor. The poor, of course, wherever one is, one owes them a great debt of christian charity and love; and I must confess that they are not quite so well seen to as when Gladys was my almoner; but then she is here again to see to them, and that, on her own responsibility, and it is Lady Mary's place to care for them now.

"On the other hand, Serena—I owe her everything; all my few good thoughts, words and works. She owes me nothing. Mr. Jones, ditto; I am wholly creditor in London: the poor, the ragged-schools, I owe them every farthing I can give, for they want it, and have few to help them. I feel almost sure I should be best in London. Rowland Prothero, I owe him compensation for my great, unpardonable rudeness and pride; I am more ashamed of that one action than of any other. He so superior to me in every way, but the mere accident of birth."

Thus far Freda got in her arithmetic. But Rowland seemed to open a new rule, farther on in Butler than addition and substraction. In

short, she found herself lost in the maze of fractions, and could not extricate herself. When she jumped up from her easy-chair, she was trying to reduce the following complex fractions, into one simple one, and entirely failed.

"A curate, the son of my father's tenant, the brother-in-law of my former maid, brother-in-law also of a man indicted for forgery. But, proud as myself; below me here, but above me in London; infinitely my superior in everything worth the consideration of a person travelling quickly through a world of silly distinctions, to one where we shall all begin life on very different principles. The fact is, Freda, that the tables are turned, and you now esteem this same Rowland Prothero much higher than he esteems you. Constant intercourse has brought out all his grand points, and all your weak ones. His mind has conquered your vulgar prejudices, but has also fully seen through them, and despises you accordingly. Well. I suppose duty and propriety concur in my remaining at Glanaravon Park, discretion being the better part of valour."

And so ended Freda's arithmetic.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PENITENT.

A WEEK after the marriage of Owen and Gladys, the following conversation took place between Gladys and Netta. The latter had been much more wandering in mind since the wedding, and had been occupying herself by writing a variety of letters, all of which were addressed to Howel, with the exception of one, which was to her brother Rowland.

"You see, dear sister," said Netta, "that Howel cannot come to me, because he is in debt, so I must go to him. He is in America, I know. His letter was from America."

"But America is an immense continent, dear Netta," said Gladys, "you would not know where to seek him."

"Oh yes! I should find him very soon. My love would point the way. I should track his steps like a dog, Gladys—like a dog."

"But you cannot go till you are better and stronger. Then we can all consult upon the best way."

"Hush! not a word to any one. They would stop me. And you know now Howel *is* my husband, I must leave father and mother to follow him. I know I was wrong to leave them to marry him; though he loves me, Gladys! he loves me! Don't you think he does?"

"I am sure he does. Still, it might not be well for you to go to him, if he is hiding for debt. He might prefer your remaining here?"

"Would you not go to Owen? Would he like you to be away from him in trouble? You, who have only been married a week, know better; and I have been married years."

"Owen shall tell you, my dear love, whether he would wish me to go to him at such a time. Perhaps men know best what other men would like?"

"But I mean to go, Gladys. Neither Owen nor you can hinder me."

"And what of Minette? You would kill her, if you took her so far."

"Ah! that is what I wanted to say to you. I knew there was something; but my head aches so, I forget. If I go away, will you take care of Minette till I come back. Will you love her as if she were your own?"

"Wherever you go, I will be a mother to her; but she would not like to part from her own dear mother, any better than you will from yours. We will not think of the journey just yet, dear; we will be happy together, all of us, for a little longer. You cannot leave so soon, after you have made Owen and me so blest."

"None of you want me now; father and mother have a new daughter, a better one than I have ever been; Owen a wife! What a word that is, Gladys! We don't understand it till we are parted from our husband; and I give Minette a mother in my place. I must go very soon."

Poor Netta laid her head on Gladys' shoulder, and began to cry.

"Well, dear," said Gladys, soothingly, "we will see about it, you and I. But you must not

go till I think you strong enongh, and till we are prepared with clothes and money."

"Oh! I can beg! I don't want clothes or money to get to Howel."

Gladys knew that it was of no use to try to combat Netta's purpose. All she could do was to seem to yield.

"We will see," she said, "when the days are a little longer. But you have not told me about the letters yet."

"No, I was forgetting them. If anything happens to me, or if I should miss Howel on my way, I want him to have this packet of letters. In them, I have told him that I wish Minette to remain here with you and mother; I have said a great deal to him, but mostly, to beg him to forgive me, as I forgive him, all our unkindness to one another. Was that right, Gladys?"

"Quite right, love. We must forgive, as we hope to be forgiven."

"Father and mother have forgiven me. Do you think my heavenly Father has?"

'Yes, I do; because you have repented, and 'come to your Father,' and asked forgiveness for His Son's sake."

"I have, Gladys; so I can go on my journey cheerfully."

Gladys could scarcely refrain from tears, when she thought of the journey she was really travelling.

"I know you have forgiven me, Gladys, for all I said of you when you came here first. Strange that I should have been willing to leave you in the barn, or anywhere, to die; you who have done so much for me! Oh, Gladys!"

"Don't think of those times, Netta, dear; they are past, thank God."

Here, the door opened, and Owen appeared, his face beaming with a happiness that it did all around him good to see.

"What! tears! both of you! Only a week married!" he said, half playfully, half reproachfully, as he kissed, alternately, his wife and sister, and finally, sat down by the side of the former.

"It was my fault, Owen," said Netta.

"Is that true, Gladys—quite true?" asked Owen, taking Gladys' hands in his, and looking into her eyes.

"Quite true, Owen," said Gladys, smiling

lovingly on the open countenance of Owen, whilst a quiet tear rolled down her cheek.

Owen kissed off the tear.

"You are happy, my love?" again he asked, as if fearing that a shadow should pass over that fair, sweet face, to obscure the light of their spring of wedded life.

Gladys pressed his hands, assured him by a glance true as oaths, and looked at Netta. The hint was taken.

In a moment, Netta's were the thin hands that Owen clasped, her's the face into which he gazed.

"Owen," she said, earnestly, "if I go away, will you take my child, as if she were your own? Will you love her, and bring her up?"

"You are not going away, Netta! But you may be quite sure that I will love Minette, without any going away. We will all keep together now, we are too happy—so happy, my Gladys, are we not?"

There was a strange restlessness about Netta. This resolution to go away had taken such a hold upon her, that she reverted to it again and again. Gladys confided it to Owen and their

mother, and they all decided that it would be necessary to watch her night and day, without letting her know that she was watched.

They resorted to every possible means of amusement, but in vain. She was quite preoccupied, and even her child failed to attract her attention. Again she became nervous at every sudden sound, and started at every footfall. She told Gladys that she knew that Howel would either come to her during the course of that week, or that she should go to him.

Her mother assisted her in going to bed that night, and before she laid down, she said,

"Dear mother! do you remember that you used to come to this dear room when I was a child, the last thing at night, and, sleeping or waking, to kiss me before you went to sleep? and do you remember that I always said my prayers at your knee, in that very corner by the little table? Sometimes I feel as if I was a child, or quite a young girl again. It was so good of you to give me my own room, and my own bed, that I love so well. If I go away, I should like Minette to have this room. It will make her think of me. I pray she may be a better child than I have been."

"Will you not get into bed, dear, and try to sleep?" said Mrs. Prothero.

"I think I should like to say my prayers again alone with you; so, at your feet. You shall pray for me, and I will join with you."

Netta knelt, as if she were, indeed, once more a child at her mother's knees—and clasped her thin hand white hands together.

"Will you pray for Howel, mother?" asked Netta.

Mrs. Prothero laid her hand on her kneeling daughter's head, and uplifting her tearful eyes to Heaven, prayed aloud for Netta, for Howel, for all. Netta repeated each sentence after her mother, and when the prayer was concluded, threw her arms around her, and thanked her for praying for Howel.

"I cannot deceive you again mother fach" she said. "I am going away to seek Howel, because he cannot come to me. If I should never find him, mother; but I shall, I know I shall—if I should die on the road, tell him that I never loved any one but him all my life, and I am sure he loves me. And now I am at peace with all the world, and have repented of

all my sins. Gladys thinks I shall go to heaven if I die. And I humbly believe I shall. I feel quite calm and happy in my own mind, only wishful to go to my poor Howel, who is alone and unhappy. Now, mother, I will go to bed."

She went to bed accordingly.

"Let Minette come and say good night to me, mother," she said, when Mrs. Prothero had made her comfortable.

Mrs. Prothero called the child, and her grandfather brought her up-stairs.

"How does my girl feel to-night?" asked Mr. Prothero, cheerfully.

"Better, father, thank you; quite well, indeed. God bless you, darling. Be a good child to grandmother and Aunt Gladys, and all. God bless you, father. I think I should like to have Owen and Gladys to wish me good night; it is so nice to see you all together."

Owen and Gladys came, and Netta bade "God bless" them all, and said she should now go to sleep quite happy.

Gladys went to put Minette to bed, and Mrs. Prothero sat by Netta's pillow.

"Good night, mother; God bless you,"

Netta said, more than once, before she fell asleep.

When Gladys returned, she was sleeping peacefully.

"The excitement of the day seems to have passed away," whispered Gladys. "Let me watch by her, dear mother."

The words "mother" and "daughter" had come quite naturally to Mrs. Prothero and Gladys.

"No, Gladys, thank you; not to-night. I will be in the room to-night."

"Then you will go to bed soon?"

"Yes, very shortly."

The two women embraced one another tenderly.

"We can only pray for her, poor lamb," said Mrs. Prothero, gently. "I have given her to the Lord, to do with her according to His good pleasure."

"He will not leave her, nor forsake her," said Gladys.

Mrs. Prothero sat a long time by her child's side, watching her; but she slept so calmly, that, at last she went to the little table by the

fire, and read her Bible. It was late—very late for the Farm—when she undressed herself and laid down on the little bed, placed near the larger bed of Netta. Even then, more than an hour passed before she slept. The last thing she heard before she closed her eyes, was her daughter's somewhat irregular breathing—the last words that rang in her ears were her, "God bless you, mother."

Gladys, uneasy, she knew not wherefore, was in the room at about three o'clock in the morning. She had learnt to move so gently that the sleepers were not conscious of her presence. She was most thankful to find them sleeping.

Gladys was up and dressed by six o'clock. She was anxious to spare her mother all possible trouble, and to see that the household was astir before she arose. It was a cold, dark January morning. As she went down the passage, a candle in her hand, towards Netta's room, she felt the chill air press heavily around her. She put the candle on the floor, outside the room, and went in. The night-light had burnt out, and the fire was dim, though not

extinguished. Gladys passes Mrs. Prothero without awaking her, and stands at Netta's bedside.

She cannot see clearly the face of the sleeping Netta, but such a restless anxiety about her had haunted her all the night, that she stoops down to listen to her breathing. It is so faint that she kneels down, and puts her ear close to the face. So very faint it is, that she is not quite sure that she hears it at all. She goes into the passage for the candle, and meets Owen. She signs him to silence, and her pale face frightens him. He goes with her into Netta's room. Shading the candle with her hand, she again stoops over Netta; so does Owen.

Very calm, very pale, and most lovely is the face on which they gaze with an eager, throbbing anxiety. Gladys presses her hand on Owen's arm, as she puts the candle near that placid face. He, too, puts his ear close to the half-open mouth—touches the hand that lies on the white counterpane—feels for the pulse, so quick but yesterday. He is about to utter the fear that oppresses him, but Gladys points to his mother, still heavily sleeping.

"Perhaps it is a swoon," she whispers, and goes for the draught ready for such an attack. The light of the candle awakes Mrs. Prothero, and she is out of bed in a moment.

"Netta has fainted, mother; she has one of her spasms," says Owen, turning his pale face to his mother.

"My God, it is death!" cries the stricken mother, falling on her knees by the bedside of her child.

And it is death. Without a groan the Spirit has quitted its dwelling of clay, to enter upon its eternal rest!

CHAPTER XV.

THE RECTOR.

Life and Death! What are they? A soul in chains, and a soul set free. Darkness and light—uncertainty and certainty! Warfare and peace! A railway journey and the great terminus. A span of time and immeasurable eternity! A bounded horizon and illimitable space! Earth and Heaven! Satan and Christ! Man and God!

Life! On New Year's morning Glanaravon Farm was gay with preparations for a wedding. All its inmates were hopeful and cheerful! Two human beings were made as happy as human beings can be in this world. Three generations witnessed the auspicious event, and blessings and congratulations mingled with the marriage bells!

One short week, and Glanaravon Farm was mournful with lamentations for the dead. All its inmates were weeping. Death's angel had glided in, unawares and unexpected, and had borne away one of that loving family, leaving only her earthly tenement behind!

Another short week, and Glanaravon Farm held no longer even that once beautiful tenement. Quiet forms moved about in black clothing, and melancholy faces looked sadly at one another, and spoke low of her from whom they were parted for an indefinite period.

Such is life!

Death! what know the living of Death? Is it not "swallowed up in Victory?" Death, then, to the Believer in Christ, is Victory.

Such is death!

These were thoughts that presented themselves to Rowland Prothero, after he had followed his sister's body to the grave. It was with such thoughts, simplified when put into words, that he attempted to comfort his mother, and to raise his father's mind from a morbid ruminating upon the past, to the hope that his beloved child had found Death, Victory. Whilst

Gladys comforted Owen and Minette, Rowland seemed to be all in all to his parents, and devoted himself to them during the period that he was able to leave his duties in London. The news of the death of his Rector, abroad, had reached him the day before the intelligence of that of Netta; and, had it not been for the kind exertions of Mr. Jones, he could not have stayed with his family the Sunday that followed the funeral.

Mr. Jones, however, managed everything for him in London, and procured help in the emergency. Thus Rowland was able to accompany his family to church, and to be with them a few days of the week succeeding that on which his dear sister was buried.

It was on the afternoon of one of these few and precious days, that he was sitting alone with his mother. The rest of the family were about their necessary avocations. Gladys, followed by poor little Minette in her black frock, was managing the household. Owen and his father were out of doors, the former doing his best to cheer his poor father, who had been, perhaps, more entirely cast down by his loss than any

other member of the family, Mrs. Prothero not excepted. As he himself said, he had not known what an idol he had made of his girl until she was gone from him.

Rowland and his mother were talking of Netta. It was Mrs. Prothero's one theme when alone with him or Gladys. They could comfort her aching heart by assuring her that they believed her child's repentance to have been sincere, and her faith, if at times troubled and confused by the wandering mind and puzzled brain, placed on the One sole and sure foundation.

It was in the midst of this conversation that Mrs. Griffith Jenkins entered, unushered, into the parlour where they were sitting.

At the earnest request of his wife and all his children, backed by the feeling that Netta would have wished it, Mr. Prothero had consented to ask Mrs. Jenkins to the funeral, which she had attended, together with Mrs. Prothero, Mrs. Jonathan and Gladys. Mr. Prothero had shaken her by the hand on that sad day, but had not spoken to her. Sorrow had so far bowed his spirit as to teach him to forgive her, if not Howel.

Mrs. Jenkins scarcely gave herself time to say "how do you do," when she poured out the grief which had brought her to Glanaravon.

"Oh, Mrs. Prothero, fach! Ach Rowland! what will I do? They was finding him in America—the pleece was finding him, my Howels! And he do be in jail in London, 'dited for forgery. He! my beauty Howels, he forge! why 'ould he be forging! annwyl! he was innocent, Rowland. On my deet, he was innocent. Oh, bachgen annwyl!"*

Mrs. Jenkins wrung her hands and cried bitterly.

"How do you know this, Aunt 'Lizbeth?" said Rowland. "Tell me calmly, and then we will see what can be done."

"Read you that letter. By to-morrow he'll be in all the papers. He—so clever, so genteel, so rich! And all my Griffey's savings—hundreds of thousands of pound—nobody do be knowing where they was. Ach a fi! ach a fi!"

Rowland read a letter from a celebrated London counsel retained by Mr. Rice Rice for Howel, to the effect that Howel had been taken

* Oh! darling boy.

in America, on the very day that his poor wife was planning to wander away in search of him, and was a prisoner the day she died. He had arrived in London, and been lodged in Newgate the previous day, the one on which that letter was written.

Rowland gently told his mother the contents of it.

"Thank God that my child did not live to see this day!" exclaimed Mrs. Prothero.

"Better dead, cousin, than to be living as Howels is," sobbed Mrs. Griffey. "In a prison, too; my beauty Howels. But I was wanting to know, Mr. Rowland, when you was going to London. Seure I do think of going to-night, or to-morrow morning."

"Why must you go, aunt?" asked Rowland.

"Why must I be going? Why ask such a question? 'Ould I be staying at home, and my Howels in jail? I do go to tak care of him, to pay for him, to be seeing justice done him, to be near him. Night or morrow morning, I do mean to go."

"Mother," said Rowland, "I am sure you

will not mind sacrificing one day to poor Aunt Griffey and Howel. I must be in London the day after to-morrow—I will go to-morrow instead, and take her up with me, and see what is to be done for Howel. He will not have too many friends near him at such a time."

"God bless you, Rowland bach," said Mrs. Griffey, springing up from her chair, and running to Rowland, and kissing him vigorously—a compliment, it must be confessed, he could have dispensed with;—"and you will be standing up for him, and be telling of his character—and of his living at Abertewey—and how he was so clever, and did never be doing anything wrong. You will be saving him, Rowland, seure!"

Rowland shook his head.

"I will go with you, Aunt 'Lizbeth, and take you to my lodgings till I have seen Howel, and told him you are in London. We shall then see what can be done."

"But you will be speaking up for him, Rowland bach?"

"Cousin 'Lizbeth," said Mrs. Prothero, "if Howel had been a good son, and a steady young

man, you could scarcely ask Rowland to speak up for him, and his own sister in Llanfach churchyard! 'As we have sown, so must we reap,' in this world."

"It do be fine for you, cousin, to be preaching, who was having fortunate sons, but—"

"Hush, Aunt 'Lizbeth, if you please," interrupted Rowland, "I will take you to London to-morrow, if you are resolved to go. You must meet me at the omnibus."

(There was now a railway within a few miles of Llanfawr.)

"Then I will be going home to get ready. You was seure to come, Mr. Rowlands?"

"Sure, if nothing unforeseen prevents me."

At this point of the conversation, Mr. Prothero entered the parlour, leading Minette, who had two letters in her hand.

"Here are two letters for you, Uncle Rowland," said the child, "grandfather says one must be from a bishop. What's a bishop, uncle? Oh, Grandma Jenkins!"

Minette gave the letters to Rowland, and then went to kiss her grandmother, who began to cry when she saw her. Mr. Prothero sup-

pressed a very equivocal question concerning the reason of her again appearing at Glanaravon, and said, "How d'ye do, Mrs. Griffey?"

Rowland opened his letters. One was from Mr. Jones, the other, as Minette said, was from a bishop—the Bishop of London. He read Mr. Jones's first, and turned more than usually red as he did so. He uttered an exclamation of surprise when he finished reading it, and put it into his father's hands.

He then read the second letter.

It was short. He got up, sat down, got up again, gave the letter to his father, and said,

"It is too much! I do not deserve it! I wish it were Jones instead of me. He is much better—more suited—married. I cannot believe it!"

Neither could Mr. Prothero, to judge from the expression of his face. He read each letter twice over, and seemed struggling with some great emotion, as he ejaculated, "Rowland, my boy!" and burst into tears.

Mr. Prothero had not cried before since Netta's death, and those were, indeed, precious tears.

Minette, terrified at seeing her grandfather cry, ran off in search of Gladys, who had been every one's refuge since her marriage.

She and Owen were at the front door, receiving Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan Prothero, who had just arrived.

"Aunty, grandfather is crying," said the child. "You said you wished he would cry; but I don't like it. I think he is crying for poor mamma, who is in Heaven, and can't come to him."

All hurried into the parlour.

They found Mr. Prothero holding one of his son's hands, and shaking it nervously, and Mrs. Prothero holding the other, and making vain attempts to speak.

"Brother Jo! sister-in-law! Just in time. If our Netta was but here!" said Mr. Prothero. "Mrs. Jonathan shall read the letters. It was she who got him the curacy."

Mrs. Jonathan was not a little surprised to be greeted by having two letters thrust into her hands, and being requested to read them.

"This one first, sister-in-law."

At any other time, Mrs. Jonathan would

have resented the epithet of sister-in-law, but she now swallowed it, and began to read, as follows :—

"My dear Rowland,

"I should have written to you earlier, but I could not do so until a question that has been pending ever since you left, was decided. Deputations and round-robins have been issuing from this parish by unanimous consent, and tending to St. James'. For once High Church and Low Church have united in paying you the greatest compliment you can have paid just at present, viz., in requesting the Bishop to give you the living, of which you have been more than ten years curate. I believe it is pretty nearly settled that you are to be our new rector, and that I shall have to knock under, and solicit you to continue me in the curacy. I congratulate you from my heart, so does my wife, so, I am sure, do rich and poor around us; there never was a more popular presentation. May God prosper your labours as rector, as he has as curate.

"Give our love to my niece, Gladys, and kind

regards to all the rest of your family, with a kiss to Minette, and believe me,

"Most faithfully yours,

"William Jones."

Mrs. Jonathan Prothero had begun to read this letter with a firm voice, it faltered before she got half way through it, and nearly failed before she completed it.

"Read the other before you say anything," said Mr. Prothero.

She began accordingly, clearing her throat and eyes at the same time.

"My dear Sir,

"I have great pleasure in offering you the living of which you are now curate, vacant by the lamented death of Mr. Stephenson. I assure you that the united request of your friends and parishioners, was but the echo of my own will, as I have long known and appreciated your untiring labours for the good of the souls committed to your care, particularly during the long illness of the Rector, when you were of necessity brought more prominently forward.

"Praying that God's blessing may rest on you and your parishioners,

"I remain, my dear Sir,

"Faithfully yours,

"LONDON."

"Rowland! my dear nephew!" exclaimed Mr. Jonathan Prothero, "this is incredible! Such a living, without interest, personal application, much acquaintance with his Lordship—"

"You forget, my dear," said Mrs. Jonathan interrupting her husband in his speech, and herself in an embrace she was about to give Rowland; "you forget that Rowland frequently met the Bishop at Sir Philip Payne Perry's, and was not without interest, I am proud to say."

"And I am proud that he has got on by honest merit," said Mr. Jonathan.

"And so am I, uncle, much obliged as we are to the 'three green peas,'" said Owen. "Let us shake hands upon it, Rowly, and here's Gladys waiting for a kiss; she'll be running away from me again to be your district visitor, or Sister of Charity, or whatever you call it. Quite grand to have a near relation a London rector; I am half a foot taller already."

"Kiss me, Uncle Rowland; I am very glad the Bishop has written you such a nice letter," said Minette. Rowland took the child up in his arms. "Grandma Jenkins is crying so in the corner," she whispered; "is it for papa, or poor mamma?"

Rowland's attention was instantly recalled to Mrs. Jenkins, who was, indeed, crying and sobbing very much. He pointed her out to his mother, who at once went to her.

"Oh! I am thinking of your Rowlands and my Howels, so different!" said the wretched mother; "he to be beginning life so rich, and your son with nothing; and now! oh, annwyl! oh, annwyl!"

"Come with me, cousin 'Lizbeth," said Mrs. Prothero kindly, "come up-stairs, and I will make you some tea, and then Owen shall send you home."

Mrs. Prothero and Mrs. Jenkins left the room, followed by Gladys, who was soon making the required beverage.

Whilst congratulations were still going on in the parlour, Miss Gwynne's voice was heard in the passage.

"Not a word to Miss Gwynne, or indeed to any one, of my having the living, to-day at least," said Rowland, leaving the room hastily, and repeating his request to Gladys in the hall.

"I can only stay a few minutes," said Miss Gwynne, when she had shaken hands with the party in the parlour, "I wished to ask how Mrs. Prothero is, and to see you, Mrs. Jonathan. I have been delayed at the school, and it is nearly dusk already."

"Oh, don't go yet, Miss Gwynne," said Minette, creeping up to her, and getting on her lap, "it is so nice with you. Poor mamma is gone to Heaven, Miss Gwynne."

"Yes love," whispered Miss Gwynne, kissing Minette "but we will not talk of it before your grandfather, you see it grieves him."

"But you won't go; it is moonlight now—a pretty moon—I see it. It will light you home."

The "pretty moon" rather frightened Miss Gwynne, who said that if she did not go, she would have the servants in search of her.

"Will you allow me to walk with you, Miss

Gwynne?" said Rowland; "it is too late for you to return alone."

"Thank you, I shall be really obliged, if I am not taking you from your friends. I am a much greater coward than I used to be. London lamps spoil one for country roads. Tell your grandmother that I will come again to-morrow and see her, Minette."

Miss Gwynne and Rowland left the house together. Mr. Prothero saw them to the door, and watched them up the road.

"Strange times!" he said to his brother, when he returned to the parlour. "Rowland walking with Miss Gwynne quite familiar. I hope he isn't too forward; to be seure he don't offer his arm, or go near her; but it seems out of place their going together in that way at all. Gwynne, Glanaravon is a proud man, perhaps he 'ouldn't like it; but Rowland is so grand and so good now, that I dare'nt say a word."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Jonathan, drawing herself up to her fullest height, "a Rugby boy, and an Oxford man, is a companion for any lady—and a London Rector is a match for any lady

in the kingdom, allow me to assure you, Mr. Prothero; and Rowland has been in quite as good, or better society in town, than you can meet with in this neighbourhood. Sir Philip is quite in the first circles"

"And Rowland isn't spoilt by it, brother," said Mr. Jonathan. "He is a son and nephew we have reason to be proud of."

Thus, in the midst of heavy sorrow, a joy came to the inmates of Glanaravon Farm. A sunbeam through the shadows.

Such, too, is life!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DISINHERITED.

Miss Gwynne and Rowland walked on quietly together for a little space. There was something in the heart of each, unknown to the other, that seemed to close up speech. It was nearly five o'clock and a January evening; but for the "pretty moon" and the white mist from the river, and the frost-bitten snow on the roads, it would have been dark; but it was really a fine, bright night. That river-mist rose from the meadows beneath like a large lake, and the moonlight pierced through it, and mingled with it.

It was such a night as lovers of a healthy, natural tone of mind might rejoice in; frost and snow being no refrigerators of true, honest

warmth, but rather tending to keep it alive, by exhilirating the spirits, and clearing the atmosphere.

Rowland broke the silence, and so clear was the air, that his own voice startled him.

"I am going to London to-morrow, Miss Gwynne; may I give Mrs. Jones some hope that you will soon be back again."

"I fear not," said Freda, "my father wishes me to remain at home, and I have decided upon doing so."

"Not entirely?" asked Rowland, in a voice that all his self-command could not render calm.

"I believe it is so settled. He makes a great point of it. Lady Mary is equally urgent, and I have promised. Do you not think it is right?"

"I suppose so; but what shall we do without you?"

Rowland spoke as he felt, from his heart. Miss Gwynne was touched by the words and tone.

"I shall be very sorry," she said, simply. "I never was so happy as in that dingy old square."

Rowland felt that his new living, with all its increased responsibilities, would be a heavy burden to him without Freda's ready energy to lighten it. He did not at that moment pause to think how closely even our highest duties are entwined with our affections, and thereby lowered to earth—but so it is. The conscientious man does them; but a helping hand, a friendly voice, a loving word, is a wonderful aid towards doing them with a cheerful spirit.

There was silence for a few minutes between Rowland and Freda, and their quick steps slackened. At last:

"I thank you from my heart, Miss Gwynne," said Rowland, "for all your kindness to my dear sister. It must cease, alas! but it will never be forgotten."

"Poor Netta! my old play-fellow! I was only too thankful to be of any service. I wish we could have saved her."

"God knows best. Her husband is in Newgate jail."

Rowland said this with a great effort; Freda started, and there was again a brief silence.

"Miss Gwynne, I have long wished to say to

you, how much I have felt your devotion to the schools and poor of our parish. Now that we are about to lose you, perhaps, I may do so. Glanaravon will gain what our poor East-end loses."

"Thank you. If I leave London in a better spirit than I entered it, I am in great measure indebted to you for it."

"To me!"

"Yes. I do not wish to flatter, or to be religiously sentimental; but your practical, simple sermons, and your still more practical life have done me much good. Now we will not compliment one another any more."

"Oh, Miss Gwynne! you do not know what you do, when you say such words to me."

"I simply tell the truth."

"I, too, have another truth to tell, which, if not told now, will never be told."

Freda's heart beat quick, and her face flushed. She was thankful that silence concealed the one, and night, the other. But the truth was not what the heart whispered, and the pulsation slackened.

"Years ago—I know not how many years,

the time seems so long, and yet so short—I insulted you by words that should never have been said. We were on this very drive, near this very spot—the same moon was looking down upon us. This very tree was over our heads. Do you remember? You do—alas! you must. Pride—most improper pride in one who should be a teacher of humility—has prevented my alluding to the subject ever since."

Rowland paused, and he and Freda stood still beneath that old oak, so well remembered by both. She did not speak; she could not for the moment; and Rowland continued—

"Those words which called forth your severe and deserved reproof, should never have been said; but your kindness, the hour, the scene, my own excited feelings, my—in short, they were called forth involuntarily, but were wholly inexcusable. I forgot my birth and position, and was punished accordingly. Pride has kept me silent ever since. Pride has prevented my saying that I am sorry now, that I so forgot myself then; and pride has made me cold and reserved to you, when I saw clearly that you wished to be my friend, and have since proved yourself such. Will you forgive me?"

Freda did not, as when they once before stood beneath that huge oak, draw herself up to her full height, and make an indignant answer. She trembled, and glanced very timidly into the face that looked down upon her's. There, in the cold moonlight, with the icicles hanging from the old tree, and the frost-spirit hovering near, she read that face more truly than she had done in the genial summer moonshine, and wished those words had never been spoken. She said, gently, but decidedly—

"Mr. Rowland, it is I, not you who ought to crave forgiveness. You did me an honour of which I was not deserving, and, therefore, I could not appreciate it. I have repented of those proud words almost ever since. I am heartily ashamed of them, and beg you to try to forget that they were ever uttered."

Once more there was a momentary silence, then Rowland said firmly,

"Miss Gwynne, you must understand that I only regret the boldness of my conduct, and that I did not conceal my feelings from you as from the rest of the world. I do not regret the feelings, do not apologize for them. They were my

own, engendered by nature and circumstances, given me by God, perhaps, as part of my portion of trial in this world; they grew with me from childhood, ever since I used to play with you at the Vicarage—they were fostered by your father's kindness and my own self-esteem, as well as by your presence, which I ought to have fled; they are with me still, have never left me, will be my weakness and my strength as long as this earthly warfare lasts."

"And is it really so?" said Freda, a large tear glittering in the eyes into which the moon, the frost-spirit, and Rowland were equally looking.

Two hands were tightly clasped, that had hitherto scarcely dared to touch each other; two hearts were for ever united, that hitherto had been as far estranged as Vesuvius and the Icebergs.

I know that many cynical and sentimental readers will ask if there is no danger of the pair of lovers taking cold on an evening in January, whilst thus mutually discovering the "eternal passion" in the presence of the "Erl-king."

Rowland and Freda seem to ask the same

question, for, loosening that close grasp of hands, and without one word of love they walk hastily towards the house. Rowland talks rapidly the whole way, interrupted by an occasional sentence from Freda. Readers, there is no proposal, no acceptance. The conversation is as follows :—

Rowland.—I have just received letters from the Bishop of London and Mr. Jones, offering me the living, and telling me that the parishioners wish me for their rector. I am most thankful now, for it puts me in a very different position—it allows me to hope, and with less presumption.

Freda.—It makes no dlfference to me, you are yourself whether rector or curate. But I rejoice for your sake, and to know that they appreciate you

Rowland.—You will know and believe that it was Miss Gwynne, Freda, the woman, not the heiress, that I have loved so long and so well.

Freda.—I am no longer an heiress: you are far the best off.

Rowland.—I am most thankful. Had this

wide Park still been yours, I could never have said what I have dared to say to-day; but let me repeat once more your words that I may remember who I am,—a farmer's son, your father's tenant.

Freda.—A clergyman, a gentleman, and a christian.

Rowland. — My brother-in-law a — a — felon.

Freda.—Yourself not changed by your brother-in-law's crimes.

Rowland.—If then in the course of another year our present painful position should be forgotten, or at least, at rest—when I am established at the Rectory as Rector, when I can come forward on my own responsibility, when, in short, I can say without compunction all I now feel, may I hope?"

Freda.—Then as now, you may be certain.

They were on the steps before the door of the house; again their hands were firmly clasped.

Rowland.—Till then, farewell, and God bless you.

Freda.—Will you not come in?

Rowland.—No; I would rather not now.

Freda.—Then God bless you, and be with you during your coming trial.

And thus they parted, happy, and having perfect faith in one another.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CONVICT.

Forgeries of all sorts are so much the taste of genteel rogues of the present age, that the reader will readily dispense with a detailed account of the trial and conviction of Howel Jenkins. Any one of the various cases that fill those columns of the 'Times,' devoted to such criminalities, will give a very good general idea of his. All that his mother's remnant of his father's hoarded wealth could do, was done, to prove him guiltless, but in vain. Counsel pleaded, some of his turf friends, themselves of doubtful reputation, spoke to his character, and he sat through his trial as imperturbably as if he had been at a dinner-party. The prosecutors, Sir Samuel Spendall and Sir Horatio

Simpson, met with deserved reproofs for allowing themselves to be swindled, almost before their faces, out of money and property to an enormous amount.

Long before his father's death, Howel had begun a system of betting-book cheating, and forgery on a small scale, which had ceased for a short time when he came into his enormous wealth, but recommenced as that wealth dwindled. Numerous instances came out from various sources whilst he was in America,—all his former associates being ready to leave his setting sun, for the rising one of his accusers.

Sir S. Spendall and Sir H. Simpson were sole prosecutors, and between forgeries on banks, and in betting-books, and the unjust acquisition of Spendall Lodge, Howel was found guilty of forgeries to the amount of some fifty or sixty thousand pounds, and sentenced to transportation for fourteen years. So much general villainy transpired amongst the set in which these crimes were committed, and the prosecutors themselves were so weak and dissipated, that the sentence was supposed to be less severe

than it might have been under other circumstances.

The nefarious conduct of Mr. Deep, as Howel's attorney, and the enormous interest he was found to have received, caused him to be struck off the rolls, and very little evidence was wanting to prove him an accomplice in Howel's villainy. However, it was not forthcoming, and so Howel suffered alone.

It was generally rumoured that Howel had forged his mother's name, at various times, to a very large amount; but, as she vigorously denied the fact, and acknowledged every signature as her own, the case was, of course, not brought forward.

In spite of her manifold exertions in his favour, in spite of all Rowland's efforts, Howel positively refused to see either of them before the trial took place. He declared to his mother, through his attorney, that if he saw her, she would take away some of that nerve and courage so necessary to establish his innocence; and to Rowland, he politely hinted that he did not wish to see him at all.

As the trial was almost immediate upon the

imprisonment, they did not press the point. Rowland and Mr. and Mrs. Jones, pitying Mrs. Jenkins in her evident misery, would have had her remain amongst them, but she insisted on taking a lodging near the jail, that she might, at least, be in her son's neighbourhood, and hear from his attorney and others of his health daily.

He was always reported to be well, and in good spirits, and, indeed, was so, to all appearance. He ate, drank, and slept much as if he had never committed crimes that at one period would have brought him to the gallows; and to the last moment of his leaving the prison for his trial, jauntily talked of what he should do when he was out of "that confounded hole."

It was with great difficulty that Rowland persuaded Mrs. Jenkins to remain in her lodging during the time of the trial, which he attended himself, more on her account than his own; for he was so fully convinced of Howel's guilt, that he knew he should only witness his degradation.

In the court he fell in with Captain Dancy, who told him that he had wished to say a good

word for Howel on his wife's account, for whom he entertained a great respect; but that Howel had positively refused any aid whatever from him. He thought this strange, as he owed him a large sum of money, and he had not brought forward his claim. Rowland thought it strange too, not knowing then, that Howel had one soft part in his hard nature, and that was love for Netta.

Howel bore the summing up of the judge and his severe reprimand with indifference. He seemed slightly moved when the sentence was pronounced; but recovering perfect calmness, he said aloud, so that the whole court could hear—"If I am guilty, my prosecutors are guilty, and all the speculators in the world are guilty."

When Rowland went to Mrs. Jenkins' lodging after all was over, he found Mrs. Jones with her, her husband having been with him during the trial. Mrs. Jones had been endeavouring to prepare the poor mother for the probable sentence, but nothing could persuade her that "her Howels, so clever, so genteel, who dined with the Queen and Prince Albert, and was hand-

somer than the Prince, for she had seen him," could be transported for forgery.

When Rowland told her the truth, as gently as he could, the effect it had upon her was quite different from what he had expected. She burst into a passion, not of grief, but of rage. She had been drinking brandy before Mrs. Jones went to her, and had been greatly excited the whole morning, as she had also been on the previous day, the trial having lasted two days. At the climax, the true nature of the woman showed itself, and the friends who surrounded her thought she was insane.

Judge, jury, witnesses, prosecutors, and finally every member of the Prothero family came in for a share of abuse of the coarsest kind. Rowland felt thankful that the greatest part of it was uttered in Welsh, and that, therefore, Mrs. Jones could not understand it, although the strong guttural, made stronger by uncontrolled passion, was enough, in itself, to frighten any one. Happily, she was surrounded by Christians who pitied her, and did not leave her in her sin and sorrow to the strange people who came, uncalled, to see what was the matter, and

who would fain have remained; but Rowland told them, decidedly, to go away.

Mr. and Mrs. Jones, also, withdrew at Rowland's request when the outburst had somewhat subsided, and left him to reason with the wretched, maddened woman alone.

He let the fury wear itself out, and then stood by to hear his unfortunate sister and his father abused as the primary causes of Howel's downfall.

"If he didn't be marrying beneath him, he 'ould be holding up his head, and looking for a lady, who do be keeping him in his place. And Netta Prothero so 'stravagant! ach a fi! and Prothero, Glanaravon, who was turning against him, and kicking me out of his house. Shame for you all, Rowland Prothero! your own cousin and brother-in-law! and no one to be saying a word to help him. Oh, annwyl! my boy! my Howels! What 'ould his poor father be saying if he was knowing all! and how his money was going and all mine too! I shall be going to the Eunion, and then you 'll be feeling satisfied, Rowland Prothero! and your mother, and that Gladys, and all so grand! 'll be look-

ing down upon me. And my Howels over the sea! 'sported for fourteen years, and I 'ont be living to see him come back again. Annwyl! annwyl!"

Here tears came, and Mrs. Jenkins sank upon a chair, and covered her face with her hands.

Rowland let them flow for a time, and then putting his hand kindly on her shoulder, said,

"Aunt 'Lizbeth! you must try to keep up for Howel's sake. He will like you to visit him now, perhaps."

The kind tones touched a gentler chord in the poor woman's heart, and she looked up at Rowland, like one awaking from a dream.

"Seure! Mr. Rowland Prothero! I'm thinking you're too fine for us now. A clergy and a Rector! oh seure! you'll not be going to see my poor Howels!"

"Yes, I will, if you will try to be calm. I will see him first, and prepare him for your coming; I will not even ask his permission, but go to him. I can gain admittance at once, I know, both as a clergyman and relation."

"Now! go you directly! tell you my Howels —oh, annwyl!"

"I don't think I can go to-night. It is too late—but to-morrow I will go, on condition that you compose yourself, and return with me to my lodgings."

"I 'ont be going to your lodgings, I 'ouldn't be leaving my Howels for the world."

"You cannot see him to-night, you must not stay with the people of this house after what you said to-day, or they will take advantage of your being alone, to make you say more. I cannot remain here to-night, and I am the only friend you have in town to whom you could go."

"Treue, for you, Rowland Prothero. There's my Lady Simpson was asking me to stay with her, when my Howels and I was having money enough to buy her presents, and her son and doater did go to Abertewey when they did like—and now, not wan of all the fine folks do come and say, 'how was you, Mrs. Jenkins?'"

Rowland ventured to repeat a few verses from Scripture, and to beg her to turn her mind to better thoughts. Then he induced her to put on her bonnet and cloak and go home with him, promising to bring her back the following

day, and retaining the lodging for another week.

They passed a miserable evening. It was in vain that Rowland strove to comfort or advise his guest. She did nothing but abuse justice, and lament her son's past grandeur.

The following day, Rowland fulfilled his promise. He left her at her lodging and went to the gaol.

He had previously obtained full permission of the authorities, through the chaplain, who was well-known to him, to visit Howel when he liked, and to give him the letters left for him by his deceased wife. The chaplain had told him that the prisoner was quite indifferent to all that he said to him on religious subjects, and listened to them if, indeed, he listened at all, with a scoffing, incredulous hardness of manner, that was more painful than mere carelessness.

When Rowland entered the cell, Howel was sitting with his back to the door, and did not turn or take any notice of the in-comers. He had a piece of paper before him, and a pencil in his hand, over which he seemed rather to be dreaming than writing. The gaoler closed the

door, having orders to remain without, and left the cousins alone.

Rowland stood some time irresolute in the gloomy cell, but finding that Howel did not move, he went round in front of him, and said—

"Howel!"

The word was quite sufficient. He started up, and whilst the blood rushed to his face, said, coolly—

"To what am I indebted for the honour of a visit from Mr. Prothero? I think I sent you a message to the effect that I am not now in a position to receive company. My chambers are anything but suited to convivial society, and I prefer solitude just at present. I have already had the benefit of clergy, and do not need any of your sermons, excellent as I am told they are. Indeed, divinity was always out of my line."

"I come to fulfil the dying request of your wife and my sister, which that letter will explain," said Rowland, calmly and gravely, placing an open letter on the table.

Howel's countenance changed at once—the

flush of passion passed away, and left a painful pallor, whilst the sarcastic mouth became compressed into a marble rigidity. He sat down again, and pushing aside the paper that had previously been before him, drew the letter towards him. He put his elbows on the table, and shrouded his face so that Rowland could not see him, and bending over the letter, gazed on the writing without attempting to read, as one might gaze on a spirit without daring to speak to it. The letter was, indeed, a voice from the dead, and dated the very day before that on which Netta died. Its contents were as follows :—

"My dear brother,

"I intend leaving Glanaravon, and all my dear relations, to go in search of Howel, who, you know, is my husband; and therefore to be loved and obeyed before any one else. If I die before I find him, as perhaps I may—my heart being so bad—I wish you to see him when he comes back, and to give him the accompanying sealed packet yourself. Nobody knows how I have loved him all my life, and perhaps if I

had been better tempered and less jealous, he might have staid at home, and not been obliged to go away for debt. But when I have found him, I will be very loving and patient, and then we shall be happy together again. If I don't find him, however—if I die first—will you, dear brother, talk to him as you have talked and written to me, and then I may meet him again in a happier world, where I am praying and striving to go, through the atonement of Him who died for sinners—even for me and Howel, who are both great sinners—yet not too great to be saved. Thank you, my dear, dear brother, for showing me the way to Heaven, and for all your goodness to me and Minette—(my poor Minette, I must leave her, but you will all take care of her better than I have done.) Thank you, I am very sorry that I was such a wilful, perverse sister, when you tried to do me good.

"God bless you for ever and ever—you and all.

"Your loving but afflicted sister,

"NETTA JENKINS."

Rowland sat down at one end of the cell, on

the iron bedstead, and that he might not seem to be watching Howel, took a small Testament from his pocket, and began to read. This, too, he had brought for Howel. It was the one Netta had used, as long as she lived, and in it she had written, "To be given to my dear husband, if I die—Netta." She had marked many passages, and appended her initials to each of the marks.

Rowland could not read long. It was impossible not to see the trembling of that iron man who sat before him; the heaving breast and the convulsed hands. And yet Howel did not read the letter. He saw the familiar handwriting once more of the only thing he had ever loved—loved and murdered, and he sat transfixed before it.

At last Rowland rose, and going to him, put his hand on his shoulder. He started as if Netta's spirit had appeared, and looked up wildly. Seeing Rowland, he struggled for self-possession, and again shrouding his face, began to read.

Rowland kept his hand on his shoulder, gently pressing it, as if to assure him of sym-

pathy. He felt him trembling beneath his touch.

As he stood thus, his eye fell on the paper that Howel had had before him when he entered the cell. He could not help seeing the words, "From my cell in Newgate—my judge and jury." Underneath this heading, appeared to be the commencement of a poem, and beneath that, were caricatures of a man in a large wig, and of others with every variety of nose and chin.

This had been Howel's occupation within four-and-twenty hours of his conviction!

Three times Howel turned the sheet of paper that he was reading, as if he had not understood the words that were written on it, and then he uttered a groan, so deep and loud that Rowland could restrain himself no longer, but said,

"Howel, for her sake, listen to me, her brother. Look on me as your friend, your brother."

Howel looked up, and for one moment there was remorse and agony in his face, the next, no stone was harder and colder.

"Brother!" he said, with a voice of icy sarcasm, "you have shown yourself my brother of late! I saw you in the court, cold and calculating; not a word for this, your *brother!* Bah!"

"What would you have had me say?" asked Rowland, recovering his composure, and glancing from Howel to Netta's letter.

"I understand you; you mean that I murdered her. I did, virtually. Then why be hypocrite enough to call me brother?"

"She forgave you, and called you husband."

"Because she—she loved me."

There was another involuntary groan, and a brief silence.

"Where are her papers? Give them me and go," said Howel, imperatively.

Rowland put a neatly-sealed packet on the table, on which was written, "For my husband, Howel Jenkins; to the care of my brother, Rowland Prothero. Janetta Jenkins."

"This, too, she left for you," said Rowland, putting the small Testament, originally her mother's, on the table. Again the stony lips trembled, the eyes softened.

"Howel, Howel, for her sake!" once more ventured Rowland.

There they lay—the letter, the packet, the Testament. All that was left to him of the once bright, loving, and lovely creature, who had been devoted to him all her life.

He turned the leaves of the Testament mechanically; touched the packet—shuddered; then leaning his head upon his folded arms on the table, burst into an uncontrollable agony of grief.

"She is—she was—where?" he said, after a short interval, rising from his seat, and beginning to pace the cell.

"Her soul is in heaven, I hope and believe; her body rests in Llanfach churchyard, under the large hawthorn bush near the Vicarage gate."

Often and often had Howel gathered Netta bunches of May from that very tree that now sheltered her remains.

"Tell me—tell me all," he said, "from the time I left her, till—how you found her—everything."

"You must sit down, Howel, and hear me patiently if you can."

Howel sat down on the bedstead, and again covering his face with both hands, listened; whilst Rowland took the seat he had left, and fulfilled his bidding.

He told him everything that had happened to Netta, from the period of her being left in the lodgings in his parish, until her death at the Farm. He felt that the one hope of softening Howel, or doing him any good, was through his love for his wife; he therefore narrated simply what she had suffered and said; he told how that she had been hourly expecting him back, until his one short note; how she had listened for his footsteps, and refused to leave the place where he had left her, until he came. All that her friends had done for her, was introduced incidentally; Howel understood that she had been taken to her relations again, as the Prodigal Son to his father, but he was not told so.

Rowland did not spare him, however, as regarded Netta. He knew him to be utterly callous as to the follies and crimes of his life; he must, therefore, be made conscious of their weight, through their effects upon others; he

knew that they had been the cause of Netta's death, and this would show him the enormity of sin, if nothing else would.

As he detailed the wanderings of poor Netta's mind, and then her anxious enquiries of him of the way of salvation for Howel, as well as herself, he was visibly affected. Not even his determination that Rowland should not see his emotion could conceal it; but he did not speak a word; he listened to the end, and then without uncovering his face, he said in a voice tremulous from emotion,

"Thank you; now go; and come back to-morrow; I would be alone with her."

"And to-morrow I must bring your mother," said Rowland.

"No, no, let me see you alone," was the hasty reply.

"God bless you, Howel, and grant you His help," said Rowland, passing before the stooping figure.

There was no reply, so, with a heavy sigh and an inward prayer, Rowland left the cell.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PENITENT HUSBAND.

THE following morning, Rowland again took Mrs. Jenkins to her lodging and left her there. It was with very great difficulty that he persuaded Mrs. Jenkins to remain behind, and only under a promise to prevail upon Howel to see her immediately after his interview with him.

As he expected, he found Howel almost as cold and impassive as on the previous day. But he fancied that this was an assumed manner, and that he could trace workings of more natural feelings underneath. He was at least civil to him, and instead of receiving him as before, said,

"I thought you would never come; but I suppose prosperous people are never in a great

hurry to visit the unfortunate. Ha! ha! Certainly my reception-rooms are not very inviting."

"I came as soon as I could gain admittance. I wish you would believe, Howel, that I am very anxious to be of any use to you that I can. You know that you refused to see me before."

"And it is no great compliment now; this confounded place will kill me. I have been haunted by spectres all the night, five thousand times worse than a voyage to Australia. That will be amusing, ha! ha! But to have my father in one corner, and—and Netta in the other,—and that cursed money rolling about everywhere, just as it did—well, never mind that! but hanging outright would have been better. Don't preach; it is no good; I am far beyond that, and I know you have your sermon ready; but your presence is some relief after such a night. I tell you what it is, Rowland, if you are a better and a happier man than I, it is because you had honest parents; it is no merit of yours, and no fault of mine."

"Howel, I claim no merit; but we are all responsible for our own actions. God forgive those

who set a bad example: they will have to answer for it."

"Pshaw! Do you think I meant that? I mean that if my father hadn't heaped up all that gold—bah! the word makes me sick,—and denied me a sixpence whilst he lived; and if I hadn't seen my mother rob him whenever she could, and learnt from her to do the same, I shouldn't be here now! No, I should be a plodding shop-keeper, or at least a country lawyer, or doctor, and should have been living in a house with three steps to it, and a portico, by this time, with—don't suppose I regret such a house;—but Netta! oh, God! Netta!"

Howel beat his forehead with his hand, and pointed to the corner of his cell.

"There she is! there she has been all the night. Pale as when I laid her on her bed that miserable day!"

"Howel! you loved Netta, I see, and believe it now," said Rowland.

"You do! And why not before? Ah! I see. Because I have never done anything to prove it. But I did not know how I loved her until I knew how she loved me."

"Would you prove it now, if you could?"

"Would I? Why do you mock me by such a question?"

"Because she, being dead, yet speaks Her last wishes, thoughts, words, writing, were for you."

"Do I not know it? Have I not read? All and all night not have her words haunted me?"

"And her prayers, Howel? Shall they be forgotten? And that Book in which she wrote last, will you not read it?"

"I don't know. I tried last night, and I could not. I have never read the book since I wrote Greek at school."

"Netta begged you to read it?"

"What is that to you, Rowland Prothero? Who put you over me as judge and counsellor?"

"Netta. As spiritual counsellor, at least; and in her name, since you will not let me appeal to you in a Higher name, I command you to listen to me."

Rowland saw that he had gained an advantage by appealing to Netta, and that Howel checked the irony that was on his tongue, out

of reverence for her name. At once he spoke as an ambassador in that Higher name he had feared to use before.

Rowland had had ten years experience of men as bad and worse than Howel, and had learnt how to speak to them, and to seize the mood of the listener. He knew Howel well; and he, therefore, used the strong and powerful language of the Bible, as the priests, prophets and apostles used it—as the word of God to man. Not diluted by their own reflections, but in its bare and grand simplicity. He had not made the Bible his study in vain. He knew how to bring it to the heart of men with a power that none "could gainsay or resist." Even Howel, sceptic, scoffer, as he was, listened in spite of himself.

Rowland was a humbler man than he had been, when he used, years before, to argue with Howel, and endeavour to convert him to the truth. He was equally right in his views then, but he gave them forth more dogmatically, and allowed self to peep in; now self was wholly swallowed up in the Word itself; and so Howel gave heed as to God, and not to man.

He laid bare Howel's heart to himself, for the first time that it had ever been so exposed, and then showed him the denunciations of the law against sin. He did not spare him. He knew that the only way to save such a man was by bringing him to know himself first, and then to "preach repentance and remission of sin."

In his energy and longing to rescue him from destruction, he stood before him as one sent to tear up his unbelief by the roots, not to dally with it.

"Flee from the wrath to come," might have been the text of his discourse, as it was that of the Baptist.

When he paused, as if for breath, Howel exclaimed,

"Enough! enough! Stop! I can hear no more, you have opened to me the gates of hell wide enough."

"And now I would open those of Heaven. Let us pray."

Rowland's eyes flashed such a fire as Howel had never seen in them before; his voice and words had a command that he had never heard.

Perforce he obeyed. And there, in that narrow cell, actuated by fear, rather than remorse; astonishment rather than contrition, bowed by a will yet stronger than his own, Howel fell on his knees beside his cousin, and listened to a prayer for pardon and help, that might have melted the heart of a Nero.

At first he heard as in a dream, then his ears were opened, then his heart. And at last, Rowland's spirit breathed within him the blessed words, "Behold he prayeth."

It is not for us to look into the heart of the criminal, and decide how God works in it. Even Rowland could not tell the ultimate effect of his preaching and prayers. All he knew was, that from that day Howel welcomed him to his cell, as the one hope of his life. He was awakened to a sense of his condition, and Rowland thanked God, and took courage.

As the meetings and partings of parent and child—however wicked they both may be—in the cell of a felon, simply harrow the feelings of the reader, I will pass over those of Howel and his mother. Some recrimination, and much grief on the one side—some remorse, and much

misery on the other. Rowland did what he could for both, until the last parting was over. And then he left the mother to the care of Mrs. Jones, to accompany the son on board the ship that was to convey him to his convict home.

We are not to suppose that the "Ethiopian's skin" was changed because it was pierced. Howel continued outwardly proud, scornful, and hard to the last; but Rowland witnessed the struggle that went on within to maintain that bearing, and knew that some good might arise even out of the spendthrift and the forger.

"You will take care of Minette amongst you, for her mother's sake," he said to Rowland.

"And for yours, and her own," was the reply.

"Tell her not to hate her father. You who never told her mother of my—I suppose I must use the word—crime; will be as gentle as you can in letting the child know who and what her father is. I thank you all, more for keeping *her* in ignorance till death, than for all the rest."

"And for *her* sake, Howel, you will read that book, and pray to be kept from temptation."

"What temptation shall I have? I shall be more inclined to pray to be thrown into temptation."

"Oh, Howel!"

"Well! This convict ship and the ocean, and chains, and hard labour at the end, don't seem very inviting. I know it has been my own fault, and my father's, but that doesn't make it better; however, I will try. And if I ever get back to Old England again, a reformed character, will you lend me a helping hand, or turn your back upon me?"

"Give you the hand of friendship and brotherhood."

"Thank you; and don't let them quite desert my mother. Bad as she is, I am worse, and I have ruined her; a worse thing that, than getting a little money out of those turf-dupes and idiots, though hers was ill-gotten wealth."

"We will take care of your mother amongst us, as well as we can. My mother never forsakes an old friend."

"Give my love to her; she was kind to me, and to my child. All the rest have deserted me, and wish me hanged. But I have to thank you, who always despised me, for being here now, and for your anxiety about me. Rowland, you are a better fellow than I thought you, and you have helped to rid me of some of those spectres that haunted me night and day. You must go! I know it. Alone! alone! with this crew! Is this Heaven's law or man's? and I was not made for this. I shall destroy myself—I must—I will. Good bye? oh Rowland! cousin! brother! remember me, for God's sake and for her's!"

The hands of the Minister of the Gospel and the felon were clasped for a few seconds, as if they could never unlink—and then with a heavy groan, Howel sank down upon some timber that was near him, and covered his face with his hands. Thick tears filled Rowland's eyes, as he stooped over his wretched cousin, and again whispered "God bless you, cousin Howel, God bless you."

And so they parted.

CHAPTER XIX

GLADYS REAPING HER FRUITS.

Our story began at Glanaravon, in the cheery month of June; and at Glanaravon, in the same cheery month, we will end it.

I must beg my readers to pass over in their imaginations one twelvemonth, of which I do not mean to say anything, and to accompany me to the gate at Glanaravon Farm, where they first made acquaintance with Mrs. Prothero and Gladys. A hasty glance will suffice to show that all is much the same at this said gate as it was ten years ago, save and except that the extraneous accompaniments are changed. Instead of a group of Irish beggars, and a dying girl, it is surrounded by a party of well-dressed peasants, in high, smooth hats, and striped

flannel gowns. Moreover, it is surrounded by an arch of evergreens and flowers, of most tasteful form and beautiful colour.

We will not linger here at present, but pursue our way along the road. We meet more peasants, in holiday costume, talking and laughing together, with Miss Gwynne's school-children, in their scarlet cloaks and best frocks. They all seem to be lingering about, with nothing to do, and enjoying their idleness and June holiday as thoroughly as the greatest philanthropist in the world could desire. As we approach the entrance of the Park, we see another magnificent arch spanning the road. We turn to the large iron gates, and they, too, are circled with laurels and roses.

We walk through the gates, and to the right, far in amongst the trees, are long lines of tables covered with white, and bearing the remains of a huge feast, at which, we take it for granted, the people we have met have been regaled. Scattered here and there amongst the oaks, elms, and ashes, are more peasants and school children, amusing themselves variously.

We pursue our way up the drive until we

come to the memorable oak, under which words were spoken greatly influencing the fates of two of the individuals in whom I have been endeavouring to interest my readers. From this venerable tree to another, almost as venerable, hangs another wreath, flanked with banners.

We reach the house, and another garland entirely surrounds the door. White roses and lilies of the valley make the air heavy with their breath, drawn out by the attractive rays of the beaming afternoon sun.

We enter the hall, and peep into the different rooms. In the dining-room, is the remains of an ample repast. At the head of the table, is an enormous cake covered with silver doves and ornaments of all kinds ; servants are drinking the remains of champagne out of glasses and bottles with healths innumerable. In the library and hall, children in white frocks, with silvered bows fastened to them, are pattering to and fro in unchecked excitement.

In the drawing-room we pause, and listen to the conversation that is passing between Mr. Gwynne, Lady Mary, Colonel and Mrs. Gwynne Vaughan, and Sir Hugh Pryse.

"I am so thankful it is over, and that it has all gone off so well," says Lady Mary.

"Really, Lady Mary," says Mr. Gwynne, "great thanks are due to you for the admirable manner in which you managed every thing. I think it was wonderful that we amalgamated, and all that sort of thing, don't you, Gwynne?"

Colonel Vaughan replies yawning, "I don't know what on earth we shall do without Freda! And she to throw herself away upon that stupid London parish, where all her charming manner and talent will be lavished upon ragged-schools and missionary meetings. I wish she had never come back."

"Oh, Gwynne, I'm thure Mr. Prothero ith very nithe, and tho gentlemanlike, and good, and handthome. And, you know, clergymen are ath good ath anyone in London."

"Prothero is better than most, I think," says Sir Hugh, "because there is no humbug about him. And I'm sure, since Freda would'nt have me, I'm glad she had him, though I never guessed she liked him; I used to think she liked you best, Vaughan."

The Colonel sighs. "Oh! I never flattered myself so far, I wish—"

"Certainly, I could not have believed the Protheros were such superior people," says Lady Mary. "As to Mr. Owen and his wife, they might be introduced into any society."

"Thweetly pretty, Gladyth ith, I never thought tho much of her before," lisps Mrs. Vaughan. "Tho interethting the looked in that dreth, the one the wath married in, my maid thaith."

"I was obliged to call at the Farm myself, to induce old Prothero and his wife to come," says Mr. Gwynne, "Freda wished it so much; I cannot say I did; you see it was rather awkward. But he did not change his old manner towards me—or—in fact—you know, Sir Hugh he might have been—"

"Bumptious," breaks in Sir Hugh, "exactly, not a bit of it. They're better behaved. Besides, there was Mrs. Jonathan to support the honour of the family, and her husband the learning."

"Yes," says Lady Mary, "it is a comfort that they are really gentlefolks. And Mr. and Mrs. Jones too—in short, with the exception of

the parents, after all, there is no great objection. Many girls make worse matches. Only they live so near."

Here little Harold comes bouncing into the room, followed by the other children,

"Mamma! papa! do you know I am going to marry Minette, I told her so; her name is Victoria, after the Queen, she said. I shall go to see her to-morrow; she is bigger than Minnie, and looked prettier in her veil. Didn't Dot look funny in a veil? Dot nearly cried, but Aunt Freda gave her some cake. Why did Mr. Prothero come, papa? isn't he a farmer?"

"And isn't your papa a farmer? and am not I a farmer, Master Harold?" exclaims Sir Hugh, catching the boy up in his arms.

"I am so sorry Aunt Freda is gone away," says quiet little Minnie to her mother.

"And tho am I, my dear."

"And tho am I, mamma," lisps Dot, exactly as lisps her mamma.

"I hope she will be happy," says Mr. Gwynne, aside to the Colonel; "do you think she will?"

"Yes, I am sure she will; she is evidently sincerely attached to Rowland Prothero, and he to her. He is a good man and a gentleman, one cannot deny that. Pshaw! why am I so sorry she is gone? we shall miss her dreadfully after this twelvemonth."

"Thank you, Gwynne; she has been very good and kind to us all; so much improved, and she told me she owed it all to Rowland. Well, I liked him from the first. You saw the Bible his school-children gave him, and the presents from his parishioners, and the letter from the Bishop, so complimentary, you know, so flattering, and all that sort of thing. God bless them."

Mr. Gwynne very nearly begins to cry, and Colonel Vaughan feels inclined to join; but by way of consoling himself, says,

"I shall go and see the Protheros sometimes, now. I never saw anything in my life so lovely as that younger Mrs. Prothero."

"Take care, my dear," cries Lady Mary to her daughter, "the Colonel is going visit the fair Gladys."

"Oh! I thant allow that, Gwynne, the ith much too pretty."

"Let us go out and look at the people before dinner," says Colonel Vaughan; "I must say it was cruel of Freda to refuse to have a party. This is fearfully dull; the Vicar and his wife, or Mr. and Mrs. Jones would have been better than nobody."

"Much obliged!" says Sir Hugh.

As all the party go out into the Park, we will follow them, and leaving them there, retrace our steps to the Farm.

There is high tea going on in the parlour, and a pleasant, cheerful party they are, assembled round the tea-table. Gladys, in the wedding-gown, with a colour on her cheeks and a light in her eyes that were not there in former days, presides. Owen divides his attentions between her and some object in the corner of the room; first jumping up to peep into this curtained curiosity, and then returning to put cream into the tea-cups, hand the cakes and bread-and-butter, or do any and everything that his loving and lovely Gladys asks him, with whom he is just as much in love as ever.

Mr. Jones and Mr. Prothero sit on either side of Gladys, and seem to vie with one an-

other in showing a father's and uncle's affection to her. Next to Mr. Jones we have Mrs. Prothero, looking more like what she looked when first we saw her, than she has done for years. Then Mr. Jonathan and Mrs. Jones; and between Mrs. Jones and Owen we are glad to see poor Mrs. Jenkins, very kindly treated by her neighbours, and dressed in the *moiré* and a handsome shawl; then Mrs. Jonathan, in the richest of silks, and the loveliest of caps; and, finally, Minette between her and her grandfather; completing a "Round Table" more cheerful and natural than that of King Arthur.

Through the open window and white netted curtains—Gladys' treasured work—the roses and sunbeams look in together, and the distant mountains are blue and hazy as the sky. Flowers are on the mantel-piece and tables, bridal-favours are scattered here and there. Above all, there is a large white and silver bow, surmounting that 'curiosity' in the corner, towards which all eyes occasionally turn. Perhaps we may as well peep within the little white curtains.

There lies a wee baby, fast asleep, with its

tiny hand outside the coverlet, and its lace cap on the little pillow. "Netta," is the name of that small fragment of humanity. Owen and Gladys' first-born.

Having surveyed the company, we will listen to their conversation.

"Well, father, don't you feel vain-glorious to-day?" says Owen, stopping suddenly on his way to the cradle, and pulling his father's grey whisker.

"I feel very thankful that it is all over, and very unnatural."

"Not unnatural, David bach," says his wife.

"Yes, unnatural. It was never intended for Miss Gwynne to be my daughter-in-law, and I breakfasting at the Park. I felt like a hog in armour, fidgetting inside and out."

"Perhaps it was never intended for me to be your daughter, either," says Gladys, looking archly at the farmer.

"Treue for you, my dear. That was a piece of luck that came without my seeking, and I like it all the better for that reason, I suppose."

"I am sure you may rejoice in the present

Mrs. Rowland Prothero," says Mrs. Jonathan, "and you certainly need not imagine, for one moment, that she is degrading herself by marrying your son. In London he is in the first society, and meets people constantly, on equal terms, who would quite throw your Lady Marys into the shade. Does he not, Mr. Jones?"

"I cannot quite enter into those points, Ma'am," says Mr. Jones, "but he and his bride are as well suited to one another as any young people I ever saw, and will be a blessing to their parish and their friends."

"Besides, if you come to family, brother David," says Mr. Jonathan, "ours is of considerable antiquity, and I cannot think how it got Anglicised into Prothero. You know I have been enabled to trace it back to Rhyddrch or Rhodri, a prince who fought with, and frequently defeated Ethelbald. You may not be aware, Mrs. Jones, that our name properly, Prydderch, means, Ap Rhyddrch, and that we owe it to this illustrious source."

"Now, aunt," exclaims Owen, "never mention the Payne Perrys again. Why you cannot light a candle to us. I am sure your Hereford-

shire Perry can't date back to the Conquest, and here are we long before it. What date, uncle?"

"720, Owen. And I wish you, as the eldest son would begin to write your name in the proper way. I contemn, absolutely, this altering our fine old language into that jargon of Anglo-Saxon, Danish, Norman, and French, now yclept English."

"Very well, uncle, let us spell it, R, H, Y, D, D, R, C, H; eight consonants without the aid of one single vowel. I declare the very name is courage itself; no auxiliary forces. Gladys, I beg you will always sign yourself so when you write to Mrs. Jones; and be sure you spell your own name as it ought to be spelt, G, W, L, A, D, Y, S. Even this shows the weakness of the female sex; you do require one little vowel to help along the consonants."

"Ha, ha, ha," shouts Mr. Prothero, "he has you now, brother Jo."

"Not at all. Owen seems to have forgotten that w and y are vowels. But he never had a taste for study. Rowland is quite different; and our dear niece, Claudia, is much better

suited to him than to Owen, for she appreciates the wisdom of a past age."

"The little hypocrite," cries Owen. "She doesn't—"

"I never could have supposed Lady Mary could be so affable," interrupts Gladys, fearing a dispute.

"She can be anything she likes," says Mrs. Jones. "She pressed me and Mr. Jones to stay there to-day, but I could not have done so without Freda. She was especially kind all last week, and resolved to go through everything properly. I told her that your uncle could only stay two clear days, and that we had promised to spend them here. It is such a relief to be here. Mr. Gwynne, and Mrs. Gwynne Vaughan, are very well; but her ladyship's constant tact and effort to do exactly the right thing, are wearying."

"Do my Laddy Marry be very grand? Grander than Laddy Simpson, Mrs. Jones?" asks Mrs. Jenkins, in an under tone, of her neighbour. She has an infinite awe of Mrs. Jonathan.

"I don't think I ever saw Lady Simpson," says Mrs. Jones.

"Not be seeing Laddy Simpson! Well, it is no lost for you. She was as ugly an 'ooman as I ever was seeing. I am hating the Simpsons, and no wonder. But Miss Gwynne is a lady—Mrs. Rowland Prothero, I am meaning. She was coming to see me the other day, and, says she, 'I know you have been unfortunate, Mrs. Jenkins fach! and no fault of your's. And she was giving me this new white shoal. And, seure, if it wasn't for Rowland Prothero and she, I 'ouldn't be in that tidy cottage by there, with Mrs. Owen and my granddoater coming to see me, and reading to me; and Mrs. Prothero, too, is seure, and bringing me something' nice; and my Griffey with hundreds of thousands, Mrs. Jones, as you was knowing."

Mrs. Jenkins gradually gets excited, as she finds Mrs. Jones listens, and by degrees she gains the ear of the rest of the party, who all, in spite of Gladys' efforts to divert their attention, turn to her when they hear the words "Rowland and Miss Gwynne."

"I must be telling you now, Mrs. Jones, Ma'am," continues Mrs. Jenkins, "that I am not forgetting all your kindness to me up in

London, when every one else was turning away. Ach a fi! and they 'joying themselves at Abertewey."

Mrs. Jones presses Mrs. Griffey's arm, and whispers, "hush!"

"To be seure! I was forgetting! But indeet, Rowland Prothero did be more than a son to me, and if Miss Gwynne was my own doater, she couldn't be kinder. She was buying up enough of my beauty furnitude to fill the little cottage. I did be finding it out 'esterday, and seure it was their wedding present to a poor childless widow as'ould be in the Eunion, and I with hundreds and thousands!"

"Hold your tongue, name o' goodness, 'Lizbeth Jenkins!" growls Mr. Prothero.

"Hush, Davy bach! we have all our troubles!" says Mrs. Prothero, brushing a tear from her eye.

"Grandfather! I liked Harold so much!" says Minette, to the great relief of the rest of the party.

"Call him Master Gwynne! you forward little minks!" says Mr. Prothero, patting the child's back gently.

"Oh! but he told me he should marry me, and that Colonel Vaughan said he was my uncle."

"Children and 'oomen all alike," says the Farmer, "thinking of marriage as soon as they can speak. Gladys, why don't you teach the child better?"

"It was the champagne, father," says Owen. "My full impression is, that a few glasses more, and you would have kissed Lady Mary. I wish we had brought a glass for you to drink the bride and bridegroom's health, Aunt Lizbeth."

"Oh, I have been drinking that pain!"

A sudden little cry in the corner prevents any allusion to the occasion on which Mrs. Jenkins drank champagne.

Gladys has her baby in her arms in a few seconds. The infant is attired in her christening robe and cap, and seems to add a new beauty to the sweet and gentle Gladys. All eyes are directed towards them, all hearts warm towards them. Minette is instantly kissing her little cousin, even Mrs. Jonathan takes its

tiny hand, as Gladys carries it round in her mother's pride and joy.

"Your grandchild, and my grand-niece, Mr. Prothero," says Mr. Jones, "may she grow up as good as her mother."

"Amen!" replies Mr. Prothero.

And with this word we end our story. The wedding-wreath — the christening robe — the shroud! Again the wreath and the robe! Such has been our tale, and "Such is Life!"

THE END.

LONDON:
Printed by A. Schulze, 13, Poland Street.